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"Theology and Mythology," by Alfred H. O'Donoghue, is an inquiry into the claims of biblical inspiration and the supernatural element in religion. The author says nothing that has not been said before by critics of the Christian system of religion, but as he condenses the material at hand and arranges it in its logical order, his book has a certain value. (C. P. Somerby.)

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THEOLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE CLAIMS

OF

BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

AND

THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT IN RELIGION.

BY

ALFRED H. O'DONOGHUE,

COUNSELOR AT LAW,

Formerly of Trinity College, Dublin.

MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

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TO MY FATHER,

JAMES O'DONOGHUE, Esq.,

FAITHFUL IN THE DISCHARGE OF ALL DUTIES, OF LIBERAL CULTURE AND MOST GENEROUS HEART,

THIS LITTLE WORK IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

Not as adventitious, therefore, will the wise man regard the faith which is in him. The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter; knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world—knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at, well: if not—well, also, though not *so* well.—Herbert Spencer.

PREFACE.

This little work is written in no spirit hostile to the religious sentiment of mankind. It seeks merely to eliminate what is purely false, without foundation in fact, and fictitious in Christianity as now taught. The doctrines that Jesus taught—the brotherhood of man and the condemnation of priestcraft—entitle him forever to the admiration and gratitude of his race: for he must be regarded, to do him justice, not alone a Jew, but emphatically, as he claimed for himself, the Son of Man.

The author claims, at least, sincerity of conviction in his sentiments. Born, as it is expressed, in the Episcopal Church, and carefully educated in her doctrines, it was only after entering the Dublin University, at the age of eighteen, with the intention, at the proper time—which in that institution is the last year of the curriculum—of entering the Divinity School, that his mind underwent a great change both as to the so-called truths of Revelation and the sincerity of belief held in those assumed truths by over three-fourths of the ordained and educated preachers of the gospel with whom he came in contact. The subsequent reading, for twenty years, of

books written on both sides of the question convinced the writer that if he would preserve mental independence and avoid the moral crime of hypocrisy, he must abandon the theory of miraculous interventions and violations of the well-known laws of nature.

So far, personal. The subject of the supernatural and miraculous is discussed, I believe, fairly in the following pages. The work was written in the evenings of a winter when free from professional labor. Residing in a portion of the country where access to libraries was almost impossible, the work is by no means as complete as it would otherwise have been. He is aware of its many deficiencies both in style of composition and arrangement of matter; yet, such as it is, and, in view of the ecclesiastical influence now warring against our free schools, as a protest against the clerical domination of all churches which bring their influence to bear perniciously both upon public affairs and domestic relations, I submit this essay to the lovers of free thought and free speech throughout the United States.

THE AUTHOR.

THEOLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

A DEEP and constantly increasing interest is manifested in the vexed question of the attitude of Science to Theology and of Reason to Revelation. The subject is by no means a novel one. From the dim dawn of human civilization, man has been engaged in speculation as to his origin, his place in nature, and the possibility, probability or certainty of living again after he had passed off the stage of mundane existence. There is no lack of books written by men of great ability and learning on the subject of the antiquity of man. Geologists assert that the planet we inhabit has been in existence for a period embracing millions of years, and, from indisputable prehistoric traces left behind him, have concluded that hundreds of thousands of years have elapsed since the primitive man first roamed the waste places of earth. At the outset it must be admitted that the subject of the origin of our race or of animal life upon this globe is in-

volved in profound and almost inextricable mystery. In the contemplation of it we are lost in a wilderness of perplexity. We roam in every direction, seeking a path that may lead to the clear light, and find ourselves, when the slanting rays of the setting sun fall upon the close of the long day's journey, as far from obtaining a satisfactory solution of the great problem of existence as we were when we first entered upon the pursuit. We shout from man to man and from church to church for instruction down the darkened ages; but the only echo back is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." One church cries, "Follow me—I know the way." Another, "My compass is true and never deviates." But, as we travel the paths of the self-constituted leaders, we find only the tracks of those who have preceded us, whitening the wayside, century after century, as the bleached bones of camels that have perished from thirst in the sandy desert mark the course of hapless caravans. Life to all of us is a solemn fact; to many, a sad one. Busy ourselves as we may in what are considered its chief pursuits—the acquisition of wealth, power, place, reputation, honorable distinction in professional calling or the discharge of domestic duties—there will nevertheless recur at times the mournful consideration of the vanity of all evanescent enjoyments and pursuits; and the man who thinks, as well as the man who laughs, will ask himself, "Whence came I? Where am I? And where do I go when the process called death disintegrates body and brain? What is soul? What is spirit? What is God? Is matter eternal? Does intelligence govern the universe, or is law self-evolved and inherent in matter?" The remark of the Hebrew poet, that "we are fearfully

and wonderfully made," though possessing no striking novelty, is profoundly true. We have capacities of the highest order. Science enables us to traverse the pathless ocean with as much ease and safety as we would the streets of a familiar city. We can weigh the stars and measure their distances; yet of ourselves we know almost nothing. We entertain tolerably accurate ideas of time and space; yet, when we extend these ideas so as to embrace infinity of space and eternity of duration—when we endeavor in some sort to realize the necessary existence of infinity and eternity—we find our reasoning powers confused at the vastness of the contemplation. The ordinary exercise of reason almost immediately convinces us that time never had a beginning and can have no termination; yet so magnificent and appalling are these very conceptions, that the mind fails to grasp them in their limitless grandeur.

It has long been established as a metaphysical axiom that all human knowledge is derived from sensation and reflection. Theologians have, however, in all ages held that there exists another source of knowledge, communicated to man in a miraculous and supernatural manner. Anciently it was vulgarly believed that God held intercourse with man in dreams, by visions and oracular responses. Homer makes Achilles to say, "But, come, let us ask some prophet or priest, or interpreter of dreams—for dreams are from Dios—why Phœbus Apollo is angered." So common had the practice become in ancient times of seeking knowledge supposed to be divinely inspired, even embracing the most ordinary transactions of daily life, that we find the so-called Jewish historical writings abounding with frequent reference to

the practice. Saul, the first king of Israel, when he lost his father's asses consulted Samuel the prophet. And in this connection we are incidentally informed that, "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake: Come, let us go to the seer; for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." In these pages the inquiry shall be, whether truth, commonly called divine, has been at all, miraculously, in times past, conveyed to man; whether he has had any revelation, sure and unerring, made to him by a Being who is the source of all light; or whether all knowledge has not been self-acquired and suggested to him by the phenomena that surround him?

No age that has elapsed since the death of Christ has been marked by more mental activity and restlessness than the present. In all branches of inquiry men are fiercely and aggressively in earnest. Earth, air and water are daily ransacked by seekers after knowledge. In the silent watches of the night sleepless sentinels sweep with their telescopes the starry heavens, awaiting the advent of a new world. To solve a geographical problem, men freely and eagerly abandon the pleasures of civilized life and wrestle with death in the dreary and silent waters of polar seas. They perish miserably amid the frozen barriers of eternal ice that guard the frontiers of nature, or leave their unburied bones on the burning sand of some Sahara in the heart of an unexplored continent. Others, on whom fortune has laid no necessity to labor, work into the bosom of the earth, not to snatch from her the prized bauble the world worships, but the greater wealth of knowledge. Science strikes the rock

with a rod more potent than the magic wand of Moses, and oil flows where water trickled! The Jewish law-giver wrote ten precepts on stone: Geology has written on the rocks the history of the world!

It is common to praise the past and to reverence the annals of antiquity. For this there exists no valid reason. Age alone stamps value upon nothing. The past has indeed bequeathed us a few names that neither rust nor mildew has fallen upon. For them, no honor that the after ages have given is beyond their desert. They shine like bright beacons across the gloomy waste of dark and barren ages. The orators, poets, teachers and philosophers of Greece and Rome were great men, not relatively, but positively; yet, as the low sun lengthens the shadow, so their reputation has been increased by the medium through which it was reflected. The standard of general culture and intelligence is far higher now than ever. For "the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns," and men of eminence in their several callings who attract no special attention, would, had they lived in the "dark ages," be considered prodigies of learning and intellectual giants. When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel and healed the sick at Lystra, the wonder-loving Lycaonians cried out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men," and they called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercurius because he was the chief speaker.

We have had some very fine public speakers in modern times, yet blind adulation never attributed to any of them a divine origin. No man who bestows attention upon the tendency of modern thought can fail to perceive that a silent struggle for final mastery is being daily

waged between the claims of "Divine Inspiration" and scientific and philosophical inquiry. This conflict varies essentially from any that has preceded it. True, indeed, Galileo sought to paint the sunrise of Science on the shadow of night; Luther, Servetus, Melancthon, Bruno and others braved the terrors of the Inquisition in defense of what they conceived to be religious truth; but these conflicts sink into insignificance compared with the magnitude of the present one. Formerly, ponderous books were written, full of wearisome scholarship and logical refinement, and discussions by grave doctors were continued, from generation to generation, on the doctrines of the Trinity, the status of the Holy Ghost, Original Sin, Consubstantiation and Transubstantiation, Sublapsarianism and Supralapsarianism, Predestination and Free Will; and in some cases descending, with only the acrimony churchmen know, to such unimportant inquiries as, whether Adam, the first man, had a navel or not. This doubtless was inquiry, but inquiry within narrow bounds. Now that warfare has been abandoned. Even actual controversial conflict no longer exists between the Catholic church and the several dissenting Protestant churches. In the face of a new enemy, sapping the foundations on which they all assume to stand, the churches are in a condition of armed neutrality, and are preserving an ominous silence that renders more palpable the fierceness of the assault and more audible the sound of the ringing blows falling upon the ancient bulwarks of faith.

In this conflict Science is making no direct assault upon what is styled Revelation. Darwin, Tyndall, Hæckel, Mill, Spencer, Huxley and others who constitute the brighter lights of the school of modern liberal

thought and scientific inquiry, avoid almost studiously any conflict with the pretensions of Theology. Their work—and their glory, too—is not to engage in profitless discussion with churchmen, but to collect facts, to explore nature and to wrest her secrets from her. If the conclusions they are forced to draw should not support the claims of Theology, they cease to trouble themselves about the matter, and, totally indifferent to consequences, attempt no forced theories of reconciliation between the conflicting revelations of Science and Religion. The Hebrew Bible tells us, if its chronology be accepted, that this planet is about six thousand years old. Geological science settles it beyond all doubt that a period embracing millions of years has elapsed since the liquified earth solidified into its present form. The commonly called Mosaic account informs us that, six days after the earth's formation, Adam, the highest type of civilized man, appeared upon its surface, formed of red earth, God having breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; suddenly filled with all wisdom, he found himself in the midst of the beautiful paradise of Eden; and that he would have remained immortal had he not, tempted by the devil, in the form of a serpent, and at the solicitation of a beautiful woman, in a rash moment, eaten of the fruit of a tree which his God had expressly forbidden him to taste. That in the same garden grew another wondrous tree, called the tree of life; that his Omniscient Creator wisely provided against the possibility of Adam's eating of this tree, and so living forever, by placing on guard over it an angel with a flaming sword; and finally, after giving the creature he formed some excellent advice as to in future eating his bread by the sweat of his brow, expelled him

from the garden. Science and human tradition teach that man has been on this earth at least six thousand years twenty times told; that at first he was by no means a civilized being, and is not quite so even yet; that he was little distinguished in wisdom from the savage animals with whom he had to contend for existence; that his civilization, such as it is, has not been divinely communicated, but has been the product of the slow accretions of knowledge, by painful experience, through countless ages of failures, sufferings and trials. The Bible teaches that physical death was the consequence of Adam's transgression. Pælcontological science demonstrates, beyond the possibility of doubt, that death existed on earth and was a law of animal nature countless ages anterior to man's advent. Here, then, at the very outset, are conflict and contradiction.

As before remarked, men of science do not diverge from the path of investigation to refute some biblical statement; yet it is apparent that the acceptance given to certain scientific deductions must lead to the virtual if not open rejection of conflicting scriptural doctrines. It is a fact that scientific knowledge is growing more popular, while the faith given to miraculous narratives and unintelligible doctrines has lost its pristine zeal and strength. The untrammeled spirit of free inquiry has made its impress felt even in the most conservative of churches. No Catholic ecclesiastic would have the temerity, at the present day, to defend the brutal cruelty of the Inquisition that incarcerated Galileo for demonstrating the truth of the heliocentric theory. And, as is natural to expect, greater moderation has characterized the tone of the Protestant churches. Men of latitudina-

rian views may, provided they do not take especial pains to make the profession of them particularly conspicuous, find membership and fellowship in all the churches. In the older universities, and previous to admission to orders in the Episcopal and other churches, theological iron-clad oaths are still administered; but, from the vigorous skepticism found in the churches, it would seem that the assumption of such offers but a slight barrier to the advance of free inquiry. Dr. Snyder, of the Church of the Messiah, of the city of St. Louis, thus replies to a fellow-preacher who had condemned him for delivering a popular lecture on Sunday: . . . . "My dear sir, you will find the religious indifference of the masses lies deeper than any cause which the orthodox church would be likely to assign. They dislike the Church because she has been the consistent foe of scientific truth; because it has denied salvation to a pure morality divorced from an orthodox belief; because it has taken no intelligent and impartial part in the discussion of the great social and economic questions whose solution will harmonize the demands of labor and capital; because she stands apart and flings the epithets of 'socialist' and 'communist' upon such men as Charles Bradlaugh and John Stuart Mill; because the system of human bondage had entered so vitally into the essential life of the Church that several important denominations of Christians are still in violent discussion about the vanishing ghost of a political question which even politicians have buried out of sight. I can see, of course, that the pipes are being skillfully laid for an evangelical revival during the winter: you, dear sir, and other prominent orthodox ministers of the city, have or may have the management and direction of this

expected awakening of religious fervor. I can scarcely overestimate the good effects of such a revival, if you, gentlemen, will but turn your vast power into the right channel. Suppose you try an experiment entirely new in the tactics of revivals. Drop the preaching of a heaven which every unselfish man must despise, a hell which every brave man will scorn. Leave out of sight the common vicarious form of the doctrine of the atonement. Preach the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, a religion without mystification, a religion without creeds, whose essence is natural morality, whose manifestation in the Man of Nazareth was unbounded charity. Preach such a faith as this, a faith that makes Christianity and personal righteousness synonymous; withdraw all theological opprobrium from those who are striving to preach the simple faith to-day, and you may live to see the time when it shall be said of the church as it was said of the Divine Master, The common people heard gladly."

CHAPTER II.

The orthodox churches, for the truth of every doctrine they teach, repose and rely upon statements made by several Jewish writers, at widely different epochs of time, and embodied in a single book called the Bible. They claim for these writings a divine origin. They assert that the several writers were directly and immediately inspired by the Omnipotent Creator of the Universe to make these communications to humanity; that the writers themselves were passive, human vessels and media, through which the divine knowledge flowed. The oldest of these inspired works are the Pentateuch and historical and poetical works forming the remainder of the Jewish writings. The latest are the gospels and epistles of the disciples and followers of Jesus. The older collection of writings ends with Malachi, who, it is presumed, wrote some four hundred years before the birth of Christ. The book of Genesis, the first of the Pentateuch, contains an account of the creation of the sun, moon and stars, the earth and animal and vegetable life, and skims over the history of the world to the period of the descent of the Israelites to Egypt. In the first

four chapters we are presented with an account of the creation of man, his fall and expulsion from the paradise of Eden, the destruction of the new world by a deluge, the confusion of tongues at the building of the tower of Babel, and the consequent formation of diverse languages and the dispersion of mankind. The four remaining books of the Pentateuch are occupied with the relation of the miraculous interposition of God, exercised on behalf of the Israelites, and a minute detail of their ceremonial worship, and close with the entrance of the Jews into the promised land of Canaan. The remaining sacred writings are of a historical, prophetical and lyrical character. Of the latter kind may be reckoned the Song of Solomon, the Psalms of David and the book of Job, the latter one of the oldest as well as the grandest of epic poems. Its "inspiration" has never been doubted. The book of Proverbs is a collection of philosophical proverbs, and is undoubtedly the best work of the kind ever written.

The greater number of these works contain accounts of miraculous events, which, were they found in any other work not considered inspired, would only excite the astonishment and contempt of every reasonable and reasoning human being. Had Hesiod given us the Mosaic Cosmogony in sober earnestness, and not as a fable, we would have pitied his mental condition. Herodotus, though garrulous to a degree, and fond of relating old stories he had heard from Egyptian priests, would undoubtedly have staggered at the story of Balaam's ass answering his irascible master's complaint in choice Syriac. Had Homer represented Chalcas as turning rods, in his leisure moments, into snakes that swallowed

Trojan reptiles, called into existence by the magic wand of the raving Cassandra, he would have added nothing to his reputation as a poet. The adventures of Sinbad the Sailor present nothing at all comparable in aquatic prodigies to the three days' navigation of Jonah in the interior of a whale. Yet it would be difficult to assign any cogent reason why the supernatural stories of the Jewish narrative should be received with unquestioning faith, and everything of a similar character instantly and indignantly rejected if found narrated elsewhere.

No claim is made by the writer or writers or compilers of the Pentateuch to inspiration. None of the older Hebrew writers claim it. This most extravagant and unreasonable doctrine of inspiration—this claim that God Almighty wrote Jewish history, poetry, fable and romance—was never pretended, never thought of, never admitted, until long after the institution of Christianity. Then it was that priests, being unable to defend their religion against the assaults of reason, with sublime audacity invented the doctrine of Inspiration. They stumbled upon a solitary and accidental expression of a New-Testament writer, that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," and upon it they built the most gigantic pretense the world has ever known. It killed all argument, and silenced for centuries the voice of reason and conscience. That such a pretense was utterly unknown to the gospel writers we have the admission of Luke (i, 1–4): "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order those things that are most assuredly believed among us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding from the beginning, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus." There

is no inspiration claimed here by the only gospel writer who possessed any education, and who properly prefaces his narrative with an allusion to the ordinary sources of his information. They who claim for the Hebrew scriptures of the Old and New Testaments a divine and miraculous origin place themselves in direct antagonism both to scientific teaching and the enlightened spirit of the present century. Between what they term "infidelity" and unquestioning credulity they leave men of liberal views no alternative. The modern Christian, if in accord with the Church's teaching, must believe, among a bewildering maze of contradictions, that the Spirit of Evil, as a serpent, beguiled the parents of the human race, one of the consequences of which was physical death. He must believe that, contrary to the law of nature, the waters of the Red Sea were miraculously divided; that the water stood up like two raised walls while the Jews passed through. He must believe that for forty years a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night guided this people through their wanderings in the wilderness a distance that might be traversed in three weeks; he must also believe that this people were miraculously sustained by bread from heaven while in the wilderness. He must believe that at the request of Joshua—a military leader of this people who needed more time to complete the slaughter of the Amalekites, bravely defending their native land against marauding invaders—the sun stood still in the heavens, and "the moon hasted not to go down for the space of a whole day," while God from heaven rained down great stones upon the flying enemy, who were as much his creatures and children as the Jews. He must believe that when the feet of the Jewish priests

touched the river Jordan the waters of the affrighted Jordan flowed off, while the flood coming down, contrary to the best known law of nature, "stood up in a heap." He must believe that at the blowing of rams' horns by the priests, the walls of a fortified city fell flat. He must believe that the Creator of the Universe repeatedly assumed human form and conversed familiarly with men; that God spoke from a burning bush; that the angel of the Lord spoke through Balaam's ass. He must believe that the most atrocious crimes were daily committed at the instigation or with the direct sanction of the Lord of Eternal Right.

At the capture of Jericho (Joshua vii) a Jew stole some gold and silver and a goodly Babylonish garment; he took it, in all probability, as a soldier would his booty, the spoil of his spear and bow. In consequence of this transgression on the part of an obscure individual, the anger of the Almighty was excited, and, as a consequence, the Jews were defeated in their next military expedition, which was an attack upon the town of Ai. Joshua, guided by divine wisdom, selected by lot the offender. As a punishment, he was stoned to death; and not only he, but his wife and innocent children, and his dumb cattle! Sisera, the captain of the host of Jabin, the Assyrian, flying from his enemies, was invited to the shelter of her tent by "Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite": when he was fast asleep she smote with a hammer a nail into his temples and murdered him. For this, the language of inspiration calls her "blessed above women in the tent"! Saul, the first king of Israel, being commanded by the Lord to "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man

and woman, infant and suckling, oxen and sheep," only partially executed the inhuman order: he spared the best of the cattle, and captured Agag. For this he was denounced by the prophet of God, and sentence of deposition pronounced against him. The defenseless captive was brought before the man of God. The record says: "Then said Samuel, Bring me hither Agag, king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately; and Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past! And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." Were this event recorded in profane history would not the voice of humanity be raised for the slaughtered captive king, and protest against the red butchery inflicted by the savage prophet? Shall we, through feelings of false delicacy and respect for a doctrine of inspiration that ought long since to have been abandoned, cease to entertain any sense of right and wrong? Shall we, against the voice of conscience and the light of reason, believe that the eternal and changeless laws of nature were, on the most trivial occasions, capriciously violated, and that the no less eternal moral laws were outraged, by the interference and express sanction of the Omnipotent Creator? Is it not far grosser infidelity to entertain such debasing conceptions of the Deity than to deny the existence of such a God? The Hebrew scriptures contain narratives of many alleged events that shock the universal instincts of humanity and outrage the primary principles of justice and morality. Do we detract from the divine character by refusing to ascribe to it attributes and passions that would stain the reputation of any single great man whose name history has preserved? Is it not more reasonable to believe that the Jewish rulers, priests

and prophets sought palliation for national and individual crimes, by falsely claiming divine direction and countenance, than to imagine that a being possessing the attributes ascribed to Supreme Excellence would reveal himself to us in a character utterly at variance with the conceptions of our moral and intellectual development? The Church, by persisting in maintaining the untenable doctrine of biblical inspiration, is directly responsible for the growth of modern "infidelity." Infidelity is the revolt of the intellect of humanity against the state of abject submission and mental slavery that "revelation" requires as a condition precedent to its reception.

CHAPTER III.

The Founder of Christianity was wiser as well as nobler than his followers. On every occasion, public and private, that we have any record of, he ignored and disparaged both Jewish theology and the Mosaic ceremonial laws and observances. This he would never have attempted did he believe that the old Hebrew scriptures were divinely inspired and dictated by the unchanging God of the Universe, who cannot have one policy for to-day and a different one for to-morrow; one code of morality and religious teaching for the Jews and another for the Greeks. Jesus better than his cotemporaries understood the spirit of the times in which he lived. Had belief in the inspiration of the Mosaic writings been a part of the national faith, he never would have shocked the popular conscience by indirectly attacking the religious system supposed to have the sanction of the great authority of Moses. His almost constant mode of beginning a public address was, "Ye have heard it said in the old time": which, so far from recognizing the theory of inspiration, does not even offer to treat with any degree of respect the ancient fables and superstitions of the

people. He proclaimed for himself and his followers complete independence of Mosaic ordinances, ceremonies and observances. He justified, by bold appeals to reason and common sense, his repeated violations of the presumed sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. He asserted the supremacy of individual liberty over Mosaic slavery. He dignified humanity by the bold assertion that the Son of man was even Lord of the Sabbath! leaving the awakened intelligence of the people to draw the plain inference that the Sabbath and other Mosaic institutions were of human origin; for had they been of divine ordination they could never have been abrogated.

Similarly did the great Reformer condemn the laxity and cruelty of the Mosaic divine law. Under the Jewish ecclesiastical system, when a man desired to part with his wife he was only required to give her a written bill of divorcement drawn up by himself. This, doubtless, was an extremely expeditious and inexpensive method of getting rid of an unpleasant wife; surpassing even some modern legislation on this important subject; but the justice of Jesus denounced this infamous law which left the good name and happiness of the woman dependent on the caprice of a brutal master! In the teeth of the sanction of the name of Moses and the whole Jewish ecclesiastical system, the grand lover of liberty and justice proclaimed that whoever put away his wife except for marital infidelity was guilty of a grave crime. So little regard did Jesus pay to the reputed sanctity of Old-Testament worthies that he even endangered his life by abruptly shocking the feeling of reverence with which Abraham was regarded, when using the strong, and, to the Jewish intellect, the incomprehensible, figure of

speech, "Before Abraham was, I am." He asserted the superiority of the larger liberty of which he was the exponent to the narrower creed of an exclusive race. Humanity was greater than Judaism, as Jesus of Nazareth was superior to Abraham.

According to the Mosaic account, the Creator of the Universe required that every male infant of the "peculiar" people should be subjected to a certain physical operation. This was an "everlasting covenant" established between God and his people. We find that, when the Christian religion began to assume some proportions and strength, this "divinely" appointed ordinance was allowed to fall into disuse. Had the infant Church of Christ regarded the Mosaic books divinely inspired would it have dared to disregard an institution appointed by God himself in the most solemn manner, and substitute for it the painless rite of baptism, that had received no divine sanction, and was totally unknown to the "inspired" writers of the Old Testament? By what authority have the Christians of the present day, who hold all scripture to be inspired, forsaken the observance of the last day of the week as a Sabbath instituted by God himself, if the Bible be true, and substituted for it the easy observance of the first day?

Never did the Christian Church commit a graver mistake than when it undertook to carry the dead weight of the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We are not, however, without presumptive evidence of the highest character tending to establish that not only has the Pentateuch no valid claims to "inspiration," but that it was not the composition even of Moses; that its

inspiration was never held by the Jewish people, but was an afterthought of the zealous Christian Fathers of the second or third century, whose opinion on the subject is of as little importance to the world to-day as the proceedings of an œcumenical council or a pan-anglican meeting of Protestant bishops, called together to fix up some disputed church dogma. The Bible must be subjected to the same scrutiny and criticism that would be applied to any other work of antiquity. Not only so, but the Bible, in consequence of the extravagant claims put forth on its behalf, should be subjected to greater severity of examination than any "profane" work. For, if it be all that is claimed for it, it must be accepted by mankind not only as an unerring text-book of cosmical science, the arbiter of right and wrong, the foundation of all law, but the exposition of the Divine Mind in all that concerns the eternal destiny of our race.

Ezra, or Esdras, whom biblical chronology assumes to have lived 450 B. C., tells us that in his time the law of Moses had been burned, and that he re-wrote it. His account of the circumstance is so quaintly written that we quote his language: "And it came to pass, upon the third day, I sat under an oak, and, behold, there came a voice out of a bush over against me, and said, Esdras! Esdras! And I said, Here I am, Lord! And I stood up upon my feet. Then said he unto me: In the bush I did manifestly reveal myself unto Moses, and talked with him when my people served in Egypt; and I sent him and led him up unto the mount Sinai, where I held him a long season, and told him many wondrous things, and shewed him the secrets of the times, and the end, and commanded him, saying, These words shalt thou declare,

and these shalt thou hide. And now I say unto thee, that thou lay up in thy heart the signs that I have shewed, and the dreams that thou hast seen, and the interpretation that thou hast heard. For thou shalt be taken away from all that remain, and from henceforth thou shalt remain with my Son, and with such as be like unto thee, until the times be ended. For the world hath lost its youth, and the times begin to wax old. For the world is divided into twelve parts, and the ten parts of it are gone already and a half of a tenth part, and there remaineth that which is after the tenth part. Now, therefore, set thy house in order, and reprove the people, and comfort such of them as be in trouble and now renounce corruption. Let go from these mortal thoughts; cast away the burden of man; put off now the weak nature, and set aside the thoughts that are most heavy to thee, and haste thee to flee from these times: for yet greater evils than thou hast seen happen shall be done hereafter. For look, how much the world shall be weaker through age, so much the more shall evils increase upon them that dwell therein. For truth is fled away and leasing is hard at hand; for now hasteth the vision to come which thou hast seen. Then answered I before thee, and said: Behold, Lord, I will go as thou hast commanded me, and reprove the people that are present; but they that shall be born afterward, who shall admonish them? *For thy law is burnt;* and no man knoweth the things that are done of thee or the works that shall begin." Further on, Esdras informs us that he associated with himself, in the work of writing the law, Larea, Dabria, Selemia, Ecanus and Asiel, "five ready to write swiftly." Esdras further informs us that a cup

was miraculously handed him, "full as it were of water, but the color like fire"; that he and his companions sat forty days, and he in that time dictated four hundred and four books, which his companions committed to writing. Of course, it will be said that the Protestant churches do not consider the book of Esdras canonical, or inspired. In point of composition and for profundity of thought the book of Esdras is far superior to many books of the Old Testament, while its miraculous narratives are not more extravagant or outrageous than many recorded in the "inspired" works. There is no valid reason for its rejection. Who, in sober truth, are the judges of this great Inspirational Court of Claims? Are they the men who wrote the works, the people to whom they were addressed, or the ignorant Christians who passed upon their merits long after they were written? It was generally held in the second century—if any consequence be attached to the opinion of zealous and prejudiced churchmen—that Esdras was the author of "the first five books of Moses." St. Jerome says: "*Sive Mosem dicere volueres auctorem Pentateuchi, sive Esdram ejusdam instanratorem operis non recuso.*" In other words: whether Esdras or Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, his saintship was not prepared to decide.

There are, besides, internal evidences that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses. In the greater portion of the work he is the central figure, and, were he the author, he would naturally, in speaking of himself, have fallen into the use of the first instead of the third person; and he certainly could not have written the account of his own death. It is highly probable that the Pentateuch

was not the work of one hand. The difference in the style of the writings has long been recognized by biblical scholars. The two different styles have been denominated the Elohistic and Jehovistic, from the employment of the primary roots of these words as appellations of the Deity. The older Hebrew manuscripts do not ascribe them to Moses; nor are they called the "Books of Moses" either in the Septuagint or in the Vulgate. Clemens Alexandrinus and Irenæus both assert that the original Pentateuch was destroyed in the captivity under Nebuchadnezzar, and that Esdras was divinely inspired to re-write them.

The first ten chapters of Genesis are devoted to the general history of mankind, occupying about enough space to fill one column of an ordinary daily newspaper. The remaining portion of the five books is mainly occupied with the miraculous history of the Jews. At the very outset of the inquiry it might be asked whether it is probable that such a narrative as we have presented us in these five books required or received the inspiration and supervision of the Creator of the Universe. Webster's definition of Revelation is substantially accurate: "The act of disclosing to others what was before unknown to them; *appropriately*, the disclosure or communication of the truth to men by God himself, or by his authorized agents, the prophets and apostles; *appropriately*, the sacred truth which God has communicated to man for his instruction and guidance." The essence, then, of a revelation must be, first, its absolute truth; second, its divine origin; and third, its communication by God either mediately or immediately. If it lack any of these essential qualifications it is no revelation, in the

biblical and extraordinary sense of the word. Should the Mosaic, as it is commonly called, account of the creation, found in the book of Genesis, assert that death was the consequence of man's transgression, and had science unerringly demonstrated the contrary; were there, for example, found traces of the fact of animal death on this planet long anterior to the advent of man—then the former statement would not be "Revelation." Should the author of Genesis assert that the time occupied in the transformation of the earth from chaos to a habitable condition was only six days; and should geology unerringly demonstrate that countless ages, embracing millions of years, elapsed and passed into the night of time while this planet was subjected to the mighty processes of nature that converted it from a burning mass that could tolerate life in no form into a verdure-clad earth, teeming with vegetable, marine and animal life of diversified forms—then, surely, no confidence should be reposed in the statement of the unscientific narrator of physical impossibilities, no matter how just his pretensions. Should "Revelation" assert that within about two thousand years after man's creation this solid globe was totally covered with water, several feet high above the highest mountain tops; and science had pronounced this an impossibility, or, even admitting that it were possible, had still shown that, owing to the well-ascertained laws of nature, this immense volume of water asserted to have enveloped the earth must have continued to do so for countless ages—would we not, as reasonable beings, be forced to the conclusion that "Revelation" in this case had wandered into the field of fable? Again: should this presumed "Revelation" inform us that, just pre-

vious to the advent of this all-enveloping deluge, eight human beings, together with a single pair of the animals denominated, for want of a better classification, "unclean," and seven pairs of all other known animals, had entered into a rectangular floating ark, whose exact dimensions were given, and remained shut up in it for nine months; and science had demonstrated that it was simply impossible, from the dimensions of the vessel, as given, that it could have afforded space for its variegated occupants, not to mention many other impossibilities connected with the transaction—should the teaching of science and the conclusions of reason and intelligence be stultified for lack of correspondence with the pretensions of "Revelation"? Contradictions of this kind might be almost endlessly multiplied were it not a waste of time and employment. Had not the Church for ages obstinately, foolishly and blindly committed itself to the doctrine of the inspiration of the Hebrew fables, we should attach now no more importance to the Assyrian story of the Garden of Eden, the Fall of Man, and the Deluge, than we do to the beautiful Greek myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha; and instead of connecting a vast religious system with a legend whose very authorship is unknown, the world would have gladly welcomed and prized it as a graceful contribution to the volume of beautiful song and story, gathered from all lands, that has floated down on the mist of time from the barbaric days of the infancy of the world. Inspiration is a secret communication made in visions, by dreams or apparition, by God to man. The recipient of the divine message is "inspired"; but when he publishes the communication credence will be given to it in proportion to the confi-

dence to be placed in the veracity of the narrator, and the nature of the communication itself. When the message is retailed, second hand, it ceases to be an inspiration, and must be subject to the like tests that would be applied to a statement making no claims to inspiration. There is, too, the ever-recurring possibility that the medium through whom the "Revelation" has been made may, owing to some peculiar mental or cerebral condition, have been laboring under a species of hallucination and thereby mistook the creations of a disordered imagination for a divine revelation. It is not a little remarkable that before putting themselves into communication with the Unseen the prophets usually fasted for long periods, and then saw these strange visions they have recorded. Moses fasted forty days, so did Elisha, and so did Jesus of Nazareth. It is a well-ascertained fact that fasting prostrates the nervous system and renders the imposition of hallucination of all kinds easy. Indeed in Eastern countries demented persons were supposed to be under the immediate protection of the gods. Sometimes no attention was paid to vaticinations. The Trojans disregarded the prophetic utterings of Cassandra, daughter of Priam, because she was considered demented. In addition to this it was not easy always for the prophet himself to decide whether he was imposed upon by some lying spirit. The eighteenth chapter of II Chronicles furnishes us with the extraordinary information that God himself sometimes selected some of these evil spirits to do his work: "Again, he said, Therefore hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall

entice Ahab, king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? and one spake saying after this manner and another saying after that manner. Then came there out a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him; and the Lord said, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out and *be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.* And the Lord said, Thou shalt entice him and thou shalt also prevail; go out and do even so."

What a perfectly anthropomorphic picture is here presented! The Lord of the limitless Universe sitting upon his throne! Like a king in council surrounded by his courtiers, devising the death of a man hateful to him, seeking advice from his cabinet ministers; hearing the arguments of the heavenly officials; patiently listening to tedious speeches, "one speaking after this manner and another after that manner"; condescending to accept advice, and finally adopting the basest policy, commanding a lying spirit to "steal the livery of heaven" and thereby betray an enemy to death! Yet men are called infidels and atheists by narrow-minded zealots and hypocrites because they entertain loftier conceptions of the God of the Universe than to believe for a moment that a narrative representing him in the meanest aspect it is possible to conceive is of divine origin. This same veracious account informs us that though four hundred prophets, inspired by the lying spirit, advised Ahab to go up to battle, yet there was one whom he refused to consult until urged thereto by his ally Jehoshaphat. Of this one he says: "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he never prophesies good to me, but evil." Precisely similar lan-

guage Homer makes Agamemnon use addressing Calchas! "Prophet of evil! for never have you spoken an agreeable prediction or one that was accomplished." Yet the delineation given us by Ahab of the Jewish prophet Micaiah is inspired, while Agamemnon's description of Calchas is a purely poetic conception! If the book of Chronicles is "inspired," the grandest epic poem written in the noblest language ever framed by human tongue can lay some claims to a divine origin. The writer of the "Chronicles of the Kings of Israel," whoever he may have been, claims for himself no inspiration. The writer of the Iliad, with a dash of sublimity worthy of his magnificent work, in his opening verse invokes a goddess to sing "the woeful wrath of Achilles, the son of Peleus."

CHAPTER IV.

A GREAT portion of Christian people, totally unacquainted with the arguments in favor of or against the doctrine of biblical inspiration, accept it, not as the result of reasonable deduction or rational inquiry, but because of impression made upon the mind in tender years. Yet the same people would instantly and contemptuously reject statements as extravagant as the biblical narratives, if recorded in any other book. If asked why they consider the Scriptures inspired, the easy and prompt reply is, Because they were written by God. If asked again, why they believe God wrote them, the equally easy and equally irrational answer would probably be, "Because the Scriptures themselves assert that they were so written." God certifies for the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the Scriptures in return recite the fact! That is the whole basis of arguments in favor of inspiration.

The most monstrous, capricious and causeless violations of the undeviating laws of nature are satisfactorily accounted for by the hypothesis of miraculous intervention!

What should we think of the sanity of the individual who might assert that the sum of the three angles of a plane triangle was greater than two right angles, and in demonstration of this mathematical absurdity gravely assure us that, if we doubted the fact, he could raise the dead or violate some well-ascertained natural law? The apologists of scriptural inspiration act in a manner somewhat similar: when we call in question the divine origin of the Scriptures they assure us that they must be inspired because they contain the recitals of physical impossibilities. Were the working of a miracle by any means possible, its performance, as affording a satisfactory solution of some other physical impossibility, would be utterly valueless. For the men of the present day and for all future generations, the age of miracles is past. We can now afford to smile at the delusions that were practiced only two centuries ago. Yet so great was the power of superstition up to a comparatively recent period, and so deep the impression made by the false teaching of the Church in the long night of ignorance, and during the eclipse of the European intellect for sixteen centuries, that even men of the highest intelligence had not succeeded in emancipating themselves from the condition of mental slavery to which priestcraft had reduced them. In England, so late as the reign of George the Third, Sir William Blackstone, the famous author of the Commentaries, in that noble treatise upon the Common Law of England, expresses his conviction of the existence of witchcraft, and says that though the testimony upon which one ought to be convicted of that crime should be of the clearest and strongest character, yet he asserts that the Scriptures and experience had

demonstrated the fact of its existence, and that those practicing it should be adjudged guilty and suffer the death penalty.

What court of justice would to-day allow a human being to be arraigned for such an offense? The world moves slowly, but still it moves!

In theology, a miracle may be defined to be an event happening in contradiction to and in violation of the laws of nature. In a certain sense, indeed, in which the term may be employed, every operation of nature is miraculous, or the subject of reverential wonder. The gradual growth of the acorn into the oak passes human comprehension; but yet it is in strict and harmonious accordance with regular processes and successive changes, the secret working of which we are profoundly ignorant of. We cannot detect the silent operation of those forces and principles by which it draws nutriment, increase of volume, and new form from earth and air and water. Yet if science enabled us, as she may at no distant day, to lay bare the process by which all this wonderful change is accomplished, we should doubtless see undeviating regularity and unbroken continuity in every transformation, from the lowest germ to the highest development of all life, vegetable and animal. In Nature's story there are no blank chapters. In the golden chain of continuity no link is missing. Cause and effect are one and the same. There is neither present, past nor future. What is is but the product of what was, and the future is only the extension of the present. We speak erroneously of gaps in our lives and chasms in our histories. Every event in the life of the individual is necessarily connected with some prior conditions, or

rather all prior conditions. Nothing is fortuitous. Man is part of his surroundings; and a corresponding sequence of events marks the march of nations from the cradle to the grave. Nay, further, this condition of dependence affects the universe. It is only when we begin to appreciate the relation of one thing in nature to another—of the atom to the immeasurable mass—that we are willing to exclaim with d'Alembert, "The universe is but a single fact; it is only one great truth."

Even in the rudest stages of human barbarism, the reasoning faculties of man must have been quickened into life and activity by the grand panorama presented by day and night and the regular recurrence of the seasons. The sun gave man light and warmth, and in consequence became the first object of his unreasoning worship. He must have noticed with interest and amazement the full and waning moon, presenting with ever-recurring regularity, every month, the same appearance. As he lay out at night, guarding his flocks from the attacks of ferocious animals or prowling robbers, he beguiled the weary hours watching the slow processions of the stars in the vault of heaven, and soon learned, by simple and rude contrivances, to divide the watches of the night into regular periods. Sometimes a fiery meteor shot across his dazzled vision and filled him with feelings of awe and amazement; but its frequent recurrence, in time, ceased to cause him alarm. We may imagine with what foreboding of impending evil he regarded an obscuration of the noonday sun, caused by the transit of a planet across its disk. History has informed us how frequently the latter occurrence has thrown disciplined armies into utter confusion, even among civilized nations.

But the careful observers of the starry heavens were soon led to the conclusion that even this phenomenon was under the domain of law and order. Hence we find among the nations of antiquity those skilled in astronomy naturally assuming the offices of priests and teachers, and, by their superior knowledge and their ability to predict astral changes, holding the ignorant and superstitious in absolute and abject submission. The day has not long passed away in civilized Europe since the crowned king trembled in the presence of the barefoot priest, and the mightiest despot lowered his scepter before the ring of the Fisherman. But when astronomy had become a science, when the motions of the heavenly bodies had been determined with tolerable accuracy; when the recurrence of an eclipse could be calculated long beforehand; when it was ascertained that this earth was not an infinitely extended surface, but a sphere floating in infinite space; when the appearance of a comet no longer filled the world with the direst apprehension; when the entrails of chickens ceased to be inspected with reverential scrutiny; when the cackling of a flock of geese overheard attracted no attention—then it was not difficult to predict that the age of miracles was rapidly passing away, and that man had outgrown the swaddling clothes of his intellectual infancy. Even in Juvenal's time it had become a jest among the Roman girls that the gods had grown old upon the mountains, and as a consequence the number of great men claiming divine parentage had wonderfully diminished. In the infancy of the world and in the twilight of reason, superstition ascribed to Divine interference every occurrence for which ignorance of the laws of nature failed to afford a

satisfactory explanation. The number of the gods increased almost as rapidly as that of unexplained natural phenomena, and disappeared as knowledge of natural law prevailed. Traces of the error of ascribing great and even insignificant events to supernatural interference may yet be distinguished lingering in modern theology. We are still occasionally presented with the painful spectacle of Christian churches invoking the Divine interference to send plenteous harvests; to avert plagues and pestilences; to grant success in battle; and even to regulate the quantity of rain falling in a certain area; setting apart, sometimes by legal authority, days of national fasts and humiliation, hoping thereby to appease the offended God, whose enmity has been incurred either by individual sins or increased general depravity. The student of natural laws and phenomena sees, the more deeply he investigates, no necessity in any natural operation for any hypothesis of miraculous interference. Every advancing step he takes, every new truth he discovers, and every additional fact he becomes acquainted with, all tend to the elucidation of the inevitable connection, sequence and correlation of all phenomena. It is only by rigidly excluding the theory of arbitrary interference that he is at all enabled to recognize the existence of the principles, grand and simple, connected with the existence of the minutest atoms equally with that of the infinite and unnumbered systems that compose that which the poverty of human speech calls "the universe." Had Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, LaPlace, Newton and Herschel been impressed with the idea that the revolution of the planets depended upon the exercise of arbitrary will, they would have abandoned all attempts at explanation

of the apparently inexplicable motions of the heavenly bodies; they would never, hampered by this false theory, have been enabled to make those magnificent discoveries that have brought glory to humanity and demonstrated the possibilities man is capable of in the ennobling pursuit of knowledge.

The three grand discoveries of Kepler are: that the orbit of a planet is an ellipse, and not a circle, as previously supposed; that the areas traversed by a line drawn from the planet to the sun are proportional to the times; the last is the defining the relation between the mean distances of planets from the sun and the times of their revolution, establishing the grand fact that the squares of the periodic times of the planets are proportional to the cubes of their distances. This latter discovery, considered as a triumph of pure mathematical deduction, is probably the most magnificent truth ever evolved by the human intellect. Philosophically considered, as affording proof of the complex mathematical laws regulating the motions of the heavenly bodies, and striking a death-blow at the puerile doctrine of arbitrary interference, that so long blinded and misled human inquiry, it has been of incalculable importance. Yet, as might naturally have been expected, this grand achievement in the fair field of scientific inquiry met with ecclesiastical censure; for the Church, in its blindness, will have no man reach the heavens except by the way she points out. Every astronomical discovery of any importance has been based upon the true conception that undeviating order and regularity are the conditions inseparable from all natural laws. The planets move nearly elliptically around the sun. Perturbations in the elliptical

movements are caused by the mutually attractive influences of the planets themselves. Knowing the masses and distances of certain planets, their perturbations can be ascertained with mathematical accuracy; or given any two of the factors, the third can be easily calculated. It had long been a matter of observation among astronomers that Uranus in his motion deviated very considerably from the figure of a true ellipse. To account satisfactorily for this deviation it was necessary to suppose the existence of some immense planet whose attraction upon Uranus had produced the perturbation. No such planet was known to exist, yet patiently, for years, the educated believers in the grand doctrine of the harmony of the universe night after night swept the heavens with their glasses. The attempt at the verification of the hypothesis lead to the discovery of Neptune. Thus science, rigidly excluding the profane assumption of miraculous interference, unclouded by superstition and unaffected by fabulous revelations whose antiquity forms their only claim to any attention, has pursued the even tenor of her way, asking no quarter, enlarging the bounds of human knowledge, and conferring benefits and blessings even upon the zealots and bigots who have anathematized her, and placed obstructions in her path for two thousand years.

Conceding the doctrine of the existence of an Omnipotent Intelligence who has communicated certain laws of motion and coherence to all matter, yet might it not be considered a libel upon his omnipotence and an insult to his intelligence to assert that he has been constantly engaged, on the most trivial occasions and for the most inhuman purposes, in interfering with the operation of

his own magnificent laws? It is no true reverence to call the Creator of the Universe, as he is sometimes piously called, "the Great Architect." It is actual impiety to imagine, with Paley, that the universe in its mechanism resembled a watch that was constantly getting out of order, needing brushing, adjustment of its parts, and occasionally even the insertion of a mainspring, while the Creator, little better than an unskilled mechanic, was occasionally soliciting the advice and co-operation of men and angels at some particular juncture of affairs.

"Revelation" has repeatedly asserted that the laws of Nature have been frequently changed, modified, suspended and violated, not for the benefit of humanity, but often at the instance of some favored individual. To prolong the slaughter of the Amalekites by the Jews the motion of the earth was arrested for a whole day! As a sign to King Hezekiah that his life would be lengthened fifteen years, the sun's shadow was brought back ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz!

Were it even conceded that miraculous interferences were possible, yet the advocates of the truth of the biblical narratives would be met with the fatal objection that not a single one of these supposed miraculous interferences with the laws of nature has been exercised for the social, physical, moral or political benefit of mankind, the development of the earth's wealth, the propagation of a new truth, or even the discovery of labor-saving machinery. Even the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was evolved by mental reflection long before its announcement in the Hebrew Scriptures—if indeed in them it ever was clearly announced. None of the

prophets, priests or seers ever invented anything useful to mankind. Though they had panoramic dissolving views of even the Deity himself presented gratuitously, they never, in a solitary instance, shed any light upon the great problems whose solution still exercises humanity. Though they could in beatific visions trace the course of fiery chariots in the air—"the horses and chariots of Israel"—they knew nothing about the useful application of steam as a motive-power to carriages on land or vessels on the ocean. Electricity played harmlessly about their sacred heads as they ascended the mountain tops to enter into communication with heaven; but never, in their most exalted frenzy, did they dream of catching the electric spark and sending it over mountains and across desert lands, through seas and along the bed of the ocean, carrying intelligence with the speed of lightning, spreading knowledge through the earth and uniting in stronger ties of brotherhood the scattered races of men, all animated by the same hopes, oppressed by the same fears, governed by the same laws, subject to the same conditions of being, advancing and retreating age by age, as wave succeeds wave, to one common destiny.

It is a fact suggestive of significant inference that all miraculous interference with the operation of all natural laws are reported to have occurred at times so far remote as to render impossible the sifting of the evidence on which they are presumed to rest; and in ages so ignorant and superstitious that the most extraordinary revelations failed to attract any popular attention. In the age of fable every distinguished man claimed divine parentage. The gods walked upon the earth and mingled in the

affairs of men. Naiads frequented the banks of brooks and rivers, and Dryads flitted through the leafy groves. The image of some tutelary divinity adorned every fireside and sat upon the prow of every trireme that cut the blue waters of the Ægean and Adriatic.

Paul, at Athens, still imbued with the monotheistic faith of his race, rebuked the zeal of the Athenians, informing them that in all things they were "too much devoted to the worship of demons." We know also that within the range of historical inquiry human experience has failed to produce a solitary authentic case of miraculous interference with natural law.

It has been usual, as an argument in reply to this, to assert that the necessity for miracles has ceased; that all the divine information that mankind needed has been communicated; that miracles were necessary for the establishment but not for the propagation of Christianity. If miraculous interposition were employed for the purpose of attesting the divine origin of Christianity, it does seem, considering the large portion of mankind never converted to its doctrines, and the almost equally great number of Christians never brought practically within its influence, that the miraculous interposition, considering the reputed omnipotent character of the forces employed, was neither of sufficient frequency in its exposition nor of sufficient magnitude to produce the desired result. It is antecedently probable, in the highest degree, that had Omnipotence thought proper to have given a divine revelation to mankind, it would have been neither partial nor imperfect, and would have illuminated all humanity, not a select few. He whom it is popularly supposed causes the sun to shine for all, and the rain to

fall equally upon the just and unjust, would, it is also probable to suppose, in a communication whose message was to affect mankind for all time, have rendered that revelation intelligible to all, and written it in characters of light across the face of nature, so that its import could not be mystified by creeds nor obscured by human imperfection.

Science, seeking to throw light upon the mystery of life and death, and what the latter process leads to, is patiently investigating the elements of organic and inorganic matter, and has already succeeded in the production of organic forms from inorganic elements. Despite the sneers of the ignorant and half-educated who are mere gleaners following the reapers in the harvest-fields of scientific inquiry, and the steady and unrelenting opposition of the churches, clinging with the tenacity of death to the hypothesis of a divine revelation, the great doctrine of Evolution is becoming more acceptable as it is better understood; affording, as it does, the only rational attempt at a solution yet given to the world of the question of the existence and divergence of the varied types of animal life found upon the earth.

The world, to day, needs a divine revelation as much as it did two thousand years ago. The questions as to the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body remain as unsettled as they were in the days of Plato. To the uneducated and unphilosophical mind the doctrine of final extinction is terrible and repulsive. Even to many men of thought and reflection it is unwelcome. We have such capacity for enjoyment and suffering, we are so filled with yearnings and longings, we entertain the consciousness at times that on earth our powers are

imperfectly developed, that we are susceptible of greater and more enduring achievements than mankind, clogged with limited conditions of being, is capable of attaining; we feel that our tenure of terrestrial life is so short and uncertain that we gladly embrace any doctrine or any belief that promises the eternal fruition of an existence uncircumscribed by physical necessities and unaffected by the ever-impending doom of inevitable extinction. Take from life the hope of existence after death, and, for most of us, paralysis of the noblest incentives to intellectual labor inevitably ensues. True, for the supply of his physical necessities man is doomed to labor. The wants of life and physical pain, not to mention mental unrest, will goad him to exertion. Whether he live again or not, if he wants to live at all, fields must be cultivated, roads must be constructed, cities must be built, oceans and seas must be traversed, laws must be framed and executed, and a complex social system developed. By the very condition of our being, physical and intellectual, life is a constant and endless struggle. In the physical struggle of man with natural forces, which will ultimately terminate in his final mastery, the intellectual portion of his duplex nature has been called into exercise; and doubtless from the sharp necessities of his physical existence he received the primary incentives to action. The savage who roamed the unbroken prairies and forest glades ten thousand years ago, clad partially with the skins of animals slain in the chase, is the true ancestor of the man who to-day marks the course of the planets, determines their distances, weighs their masses, and flashes the thoughts of his busy brain to his co-workers as fast as lightning can carry them, on wires lying

deep on the ocean's bed; but in intellectual endowment and development they are wider apart than the same savage from the ourang-outang! Knowledge, with man, has not been a sudden revelation that flashed like a sunbeam on his soul. His progress has been essentially slow and painful. Every new lesson acquired has been committed to memory in much suffering, in patient waiting, and through repeated failures. Yet is all that he has gained but an earnest of the goodly heritage that the generations who shall succeed him shall enjoy of intellectual development beyond his wildest imaginings. The dream of yesterday is the realization of to-day; while the magnificent achievements of the hour will in their turn be merged in the mightier conquests of to-morrow!

What man, standing even on the outer rim of this waning century, turning his face to the past splendid achievements within his own memory, can dare assign a limit to the future triumphs of humanity? Yet, notwithstanding our progress, no matter how great and important the movements made in social and political economy; had we even succeeded in minimizing human suffering and reached the highest degree of perfection man is capable of attaining—so long as the basis of our religious systems is unstable and shifting, will perplexity and doubt paralyze our efforts and retard our progress.

CHAPTER V.

It is asserted that the religious system of every race, in every age, is the exact measure of the civilization attained. History amply verifies the assertion. It is also equally true that no religious system can long be maintained not in harmony with the existing civilization. When religion is inferior to the civilization, it is abandoned, though not immediately. When it is superior to the age, which rarely happens, it finds acceptance with only a few advanced thinkers, and is not popular until a higher intelligence elevates public sentiment.

Thus the monotheistic teaching of Moses was forced upon the Jewish race in the early stages of its history. The civilization of the people being of the crudest kind, when the pressure of Moses' presence was withdrawn it fell naturally and inevitably into the idolatrous practices and worship of the surrounding nations, and which was suited to their condition. Their frequent cry was, their history informs us, "Make us gods to go before us; for as for this Moses that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what has become of him"; and, naturally enough, they made a golden calf and

worshiped the works of men's hands. Hence it is that almost absolute failure, considering the amount of money, time and ability wasted, has marked all missionary enterprise for the "evangelization" of the savages of our own or other lands.

A savage who can hardly count ten is not in the best mental condition to bestow thought upon the complex doctrines of the trinity, vicarious atonement, sanctification and justification by faith. He may be induced to submit to the process of baptism or immersion, because it is urged upon him by a being whom he regards as his superior; but he knows as little of the theological aspect of the rite as he does of Newton's Principia. It is a question worthy of serious consideration whether some means should not be adopted to restrain amiable but deluded people from annually expending large sums of money in "bringing glad tidings" to the Ethiopian which he is utterly incapable of comprehending, while the children of want and vice, crime and neglect in all our great cities are crying for bread, stunted in their physical and intellectual growth, filling our prisons long before they reach manhood, and corrupting the social system of which they are both the victims and avengers.

If miracles have been employed in aid of Revelation and the laws of nature have been violated to support religious teaching, it must be admitted that the divine energy exercised has not accomplished all that might have reasonably been expected. According to the Hebrew Scriptures, the performance of miracles was of almost daily occurrence. Not only on occasions of national importance, but in the most trivial affairs of life, the Deity was invoked, and the interference of the Om-

nipotent was successfully called into requisition whether a vast army was to be smitten by the angel of death, or a piece of iron made to float to the surface of a stream at the entreaty of a poor woodcutter. Yet, notwithstanding this wanton prodigality of miraculous interferences, we do not find that either the moral character or political condition of the race for whose benefit these exhibitions of divine energy were given differed much from that of the surrounding races upon whom no such distinguished favors were conferred.

The propagation of Christianity, it is claimed, affords the best proof of its divine origin. Without now entering into a discussion of this subject, it does seem that had Omnipotence actively interfered in its origin and propagation, the results do not at all appear commensurate with the extraordinary character and force of the energy employed. Though two thousand years, nearly, have elapsed since the institution of Christianity, yet there are, to-day, two hundred millions of people, on the very continent in which it originated, who have never heard even the name of its reputed founder, and are totally ignorant of its existence. It may also be remarked that the difference existing between professing Christians —differences so great as to almost admit of their classification as different religions—are in little accord with the supposition of the employment of that spirit of harmony manifested in the natural phenomena expressive of Divine Intelligence.

Owing to the accident of the birth of the founder of Christianity, and the policy of the Christian Church in after ages in grafting Judaism upon the Christian religion, the sublime teaching of Jesus of Nazareth has been

distorted by the unnatural mixture of theology and mythology that formed the groundwork of the religion of the Jews. In its savage, merciless and bloody persecution of scientific men, philosophical writers and religious reformers who were in advance of the times in which they lived, the Christian Church endeavored, by a base subterfuge, to borrow sanction for its crimes and outrages, against the most enlightened exponents of human civilization, from the policy of the Jewish Church against its enemies. The Jewish Church, if we except the Christian, was the most intolerant in the world. The prophet Elijah on one occasion dyed the waters of the brook Kishon with the blood of four hundred and fifty prophets who worshiped the god Baal! However suited the religious system of the Jews and their worship of a "jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children," might have been to a "peculiar people," in an age of almost universal ignorance and superstition, it is evident that such a system is wholly unsuited, in any form, to the enlightened spirit of the present age. The revolt of reason, intellect and science now is not so much a revolt against what Christianity, as contemplated by Jesus, ought to have been, but what it has been and is—hostile to free inquiry, hostile to independence of thought, hostile to scientific investigation, historical research, and hostile to any effort that would emancipate mankind from the intellectual thralldom that marked the history—if history it ever had—of an Eastern race who have left nothing worthy of record after them except the melancholy fact that others succeeded in injecting their absurd and illiberal religious conceptions into the lifeblood of modern civilization.

That Christianity must, if it endeavors to harmonize with the intellectual life of the world, eject from its system this foreign element hardly admits of question. Should it, however, through a species of fatuity, endeavor to preserve its incorporation with what the world has outgrown, condemned and rejected, its own survival as the religion of the future is equally impossible and undesirable.

Had Christianity been of Grecian or Latin origin, it is probable that no taint of the mythologies of either would have adhered to it. Nor would the poetical, historical and philosophical works of Greece or Rome, though ranking far higher as literary productions than the Jewish writings, have been considered divinely inspired. Yet the Christian Church presents the strange spectacle of rejecting as unworthy of perusal the noblest monuments of an ancient civilization, while she adopts, as the very expression of Divinity, the absurdities and monstrosities of Oriental romance and fiction.

CHAPTER VI.

Before considering the evidence upon which Christian Revelation rests, let us advert briefly to the condition of the world previous to the introduction of Christianity. It is in the highest degree probable that the first religious conceptions of mankind were polytheistic. A vast interval must have elapsed before man emerged from an absolutely savage condition to even the rudest form of civilization. In this long tract of time, which we have no means now of estimating with any degree of accuracy, prehistoric man entertained few religious ideas and no system of religious worship. In intellectual development he differed little from the ape or baboon. His language consisted of a few guttural sounds denoting pleasure and pain. In communication he made use of signs and gesticulations, traces of which survive to the present time. When he had fallen upon the art of making a fire and became acquainted with its use, he had made important progress. So important, indeed, was this discovery, that ancient mythology ascribed it to Japetus, the son of Cœlus and Terra, who had stolen the art from heaven. The traces that primitive man has left

behind him, which geological and paleontological discoveries have exposed, afford abundant proof of man's uncivilized condition in prehistoric times. They furnish complete refutation, were any needed, of the absurd myth, derived from Assyrian legends, that the first man was the most perfect of his kind. All research has brought to light nowhere, on the surface of the earth, or beneath it, any evidences of aboriginal civilization, but abundant proofs of the contrary. If mankind had, many thousands of years ago, attained to a moderate degree of culture, we would have many evidences of the fact. If, owing to some catastrophe, the human race were suddenly swept out of existence, as might easily, and will probably sometime, happen, and were, after the lapse of centuries, succeeded in the occupancy of this globe by a new order of intelligent beings, they would experience no difficulty in concluding that the race that had preceded them possessed mental ability and physical energy of the most remarkable order. How grand would be their astonishment and intense their satisfaction in reading the outlines of human civilization in the noble monuments of his power man had left behind him! When they came upon the ruins of our mighty bridges and magnificent public buildings, our tunnels and viaducts through rivers and mountains, our telegraph wires fished up from the bed of the ocean, our steam engines and printing presses, our iron roads, our ships, our houses and machinery, our books and our newspapers, they would stand dumb in admiration as they contemplated the eloquent exponents of a mighty race extinct and a marvelous civilization dead! But what have the primitive races left behind them indicative of civilization

and progress? Absolutely nothing, if we except a few rude implements of stone, hatchets and arrowheads, a few mounds and cairns, and rude dwelling-places in lakes and bogs, in which we would not shelter our domesticated animals or cattle. Countless ages must have elapsed while man lived in a nomadic condition. The cities of India, Egypt and Mexico belong to a comparatively recent period in human history. They had no existence in what is termed the age of stone. It was only when he developed the higher social qualities of his nature that man began to live in communities. His savage nature must have been subdued by bitter experience of his inability, in a condition of isolation, to contend with animals stronger and more ferocious than himself, before he acquired the control of his passions and appetites sufficiently for the existence of communistic association. He next learned to build and inhabit cities, which became his defenses against the attacks of predatory bands, as well as the foci from which civilization radiated. Cities are generally the centers of all great movements. When the intelligence of Rome had overthrown the mythology of the gods, the ancient cult still flourished in the country. Those who adhered to it were styled "pagans" or villagers. The Christian Church improperly employed the term as designating idolatrous nations.

It is a fact that the religious ideas of the primitive races scattered over the surface of the earth presented many differences, totally irreconcilable with the theory of a divine revelation. It is presumed that these differences in religious conceptions were the result of difference

in location, difference in mode of living, difference in physical phenomena, difference in climate, food, and in the difficulties that each race or tribe had to contend with in its struggle for existence. If this hypothesis be a reasonable one, it would follow that the religious ideas and modes of worship of the natives of Hindostan would vary very considerably from the religious conceptions and practices of the inhabitants of southern Europe at the same period of time. If a particular race or tribe were confined to a country where the aspect of nature was wild and terrible—in a land of lofty mountains whose summits were crowned with perpetual snow, of dense forests filled with ferocious animals, where monstrous serpents and venomous reptiles rendered existence almost intolerable, where wide and rapid rivers overflowed, at times, a great portion of the country and swept away the toil and labor of years, where lagoons were infested with alligators and other terrible monsters, where pestiferous malaria, noisome plagues, and epidemics annually carried away a great portion of the population, where earthquakes and hurricanes spread devastation—in such circumstances and afflicted with such appalling environments, we should naturally expect that the religion of the race would partake of the gloom and horror that tinctured every day's existence. Instead, like the modern Christian, of forming extravagant pictures of heaven, of dreaming of a beautiful city, through the midst of which flowed a river clear as crystal, whose streets were paved with pure gold, where the Deity forever sat upon a great white throne resplendent with diamonds and precious stones of all colors and hues, the religious worship would be naturally exercised in at-

tempting to appease the ferocity of the monsters exciting terror, and in endeavoring to secure immunity from danger by offering gifts to the priests, or decorating the temple in which was popularly supposed to reside the Divinity of the terrible spirits that wrought desolation and havoc among men.

In speculating upon future existence, the power of imagination is called into more exercise than the reasoning faculties. In all ages the imagination has given form and color to man's religious views. The wilder and more exuberant the imagination, the more incongruous and extravagant will be religious ideas and the modes of worship in which they are expressed. Conversely, in the same proportion as the imagination is under the control of reason will all religious worship conform to the requirements of decency and moderation. Buckle remarks: "So complete is our ignorance respecting another life that it is no wonder if the stoutest heart should quail at the sudden approach of that dark and untried future. On this subject the reason is perfectly silent; the imagination therefore is uncontrolled."

In India, probably, more than any other country on the surface of the globe, are the natural phenomena more calculated to excite the imagination and oppress and bewilder the reasoning powers. Hence, we should naturally expect that both the ancient literature and religion of that land would be distinguished by luxuriance and extravagance of imagination, transgressing all reasonable bounds. There the aspect of nature is grand and imposing. The mountains are the highest in the world. Its rivers are swift, deep and turbulent. The land is covered with impenetrable jungles whose stillness

is only broken by the tramp of the mighty elephant, the howl of the hyena, and the appalling roar of the tiger. The rivers swarm with alligators of horrible aspect; deadly vipers and reptiles attain to monstrous growth, favored by a tropical sun and rank vegetation. Destructive tempests that convulse the face of nature sweep over land and sea with a suddenness and fury that render man utterly powerless to provide against the terrible calamities that follow in their track. The heat is oppressive. Plagues more terrible than invading armies sometimes sweep off the population by millions. The individual is almost appalled by the magnitude of the evils with which he has to struggle for existence. His physical and mental energies are debilitated. His reason is subjugated, while his imagination runs riot. His condition being almost intolerable, he easily believes that his forefathers were superior to himself. The blessed time in which they lived was the golden age. The gods, now enraged, were then friendly to men—they resided upon earth and associated in the most intimate relations with humanity. This blessed age, however, he assigns to an antiquity so remote as to render any attempt to rob him of his delusion impossible. This far-behind and dim past he peoples with the creations of his imagination, clothes them with flesh and blood, ascribes to them strength of body, prolongation of life and splendor of achievements far surpassing anything existing in the degenerate days that he has fallen upon. This disposition to magnify and extol the past is indeed a natural trait and confined to no particular race or locality. Homer admirably portrays this when he represents the old man Nester boasting that he had lived through

three generations of articulate-speaking men, that he never in his latter days saw such men as he associated with in his youth, that they were like the immortal gods and fought with the gods. It is highly probable, had Nestor a great-grandson, he also in his dotage would have made a remark very similar. In the Hebrew Scriptures, borrowed from Assyrian sources, we find allusion to the great age attained by men in the infancy of the world. Previous to the deluge, we are informed that the duration of human life averaged eight hundred years. "There were giants on the earth in those days; and also after that when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, that they bare children unto them, and the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."

But the imaginative power of the Jew, though undoubtedly great, was modest and within bounds compared with that of the Hindu. In the Vishnu Purana we are informed that for sixty thousand years "no other youthful monarch except Alarka reigned over the earth." Wilford, in his "Asiatic Researches," says: "When the Puranics speak of ancient times they are equally extravagant. According to them King Yudhisther reigned seven and twenty thousand years." The same author also makes mention of King Prathand, who was two hundred thousand years old when he ascended the throne. He only reigned six million three hundred thousand years, when he abdicated in favor of his sons, and spent the few remaining days—only one hundred thousand years—of his useful life in prayer, sanctity and seclusion from the cares of the world. Sir William Jones, the greatest Oriental scholar of his day, says: "We hear of

a conversation between Valmic and Vyasa, two bards whose ages were separated by a period of eight hundred and sixty-four thousand years." The Institutes of Menu are probably about three thousand years old; yet the Hindu tradition asserts that they were divinely revealed to man some two thousand million years ago! The worship of the god Siva is the most ancient as well as the most prevalent in India. Brahma and Vishnu subsequently shared divine honors with him, and the three compose the Hindu Trinity. The representations of the god Siva inspire the Hindu mind with terror. The cultured Greek, loving the beautiful, would turn away in disgust from the representations of a god before whom the Hindu abjectly prostrates himself. The image of Siva is encircled by a string of knotted snakes. His necklace consists of human bones strung together. He carries a human skull in his right hand. He is a monster with three eyes, and partially clothed with the skin of a tiger. The head of a horrible cobra di capello towers over his left shoulder. The wife of this horrible god, whose worship is the most popular in India, is represented in equally disgusting colors. Doorga has a body painted blue. She has four arms, on one of which she supports the skull of a giant. The palms of the quadrumanous goddess are stained with blood. Her tongue is long, and protrudes from her mouth lolling like that of a hound afflicted with thirst. She, also, has a necklace of human skulls; and the hands of her victims are suspended from her waist. The religious worship of Hindostan is a horrible exhibition, the result of the abject slavery and subjugation of the intellect, suggested largely by the natural phenomena, climate and other

forces that operated upon the Oriental mind. Traces of bloody and ferocious character in the religion of the Hindus were plainly discernible up to within a very recent period.

Grecian literature, mythology and worship present a strong contrast to the literature, mythology and worship of India, but not stronger than the contrast presented between the natural phenomena of Greece and Hindostan. In India the vastness of natural phenomena and the constant recurrence of unforeseen calamities intimidated man and retarded his intellectual development. No similar condition of things existed in Greece. The climate is genial and salubrious. Its mountains, while sufficiently lofty to inspire a feeling of grandeur, inspire no terror. Great convulsions of nature are almost unknown. The seas that lave its coasts are placid, and dotted with pleasant islands. Vines whose generous vintage quickened the blood and stimulated physical and mental activity clad every hill. Wild beasts were neither so numerous nor ferocious as in India. Nature did not appall man nor subdue his intellect, but kindly, with moderate labor, yielded him generous sustenance. The imagination was controlled by reason and was unawed by phenomena which ruder races would have, in their ignorance, deemed supernatural. Reversing the Jewish theogony, the Greek created his gods in his own image and likeness. He brought the gods down to earth and elevated to high Olympus the heroes of humanity. No horrible and disgusting representations of the divinities disfigured Grecian temples and shrines. The good and the beautiful—*τὸ καλον καὶ τὸ αγαθον*—were symbolized in the noblest conceptions of a cultivated intellect and

poetic imagination. They neither exposed their children to perish on the rivers' banks nor "made them to pass through the fire," like some of the Eastern races. Kronos or Time was the father of the gods. He indeed devoured his children; but this probably was only a fanciful expression of the truism that time devours all things (*Tempus omnium edax*). The chief divinities were Zeus (Jupiter–Juvans-Pater, or helping father), the god of heaven; Poesseidon (Neptune), the god of the seas; and Pluto, the god of Hades. Human sacrifices were unknown among them in the days of their civilization; though probably this bloody and debasing mode of worship may have disgraced their early history, as the story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aulis would seem to indicate. The Greek apotheosized his own conceptions and ascribed to his gods and goddesses the passions, virtues and vices of men and women. Courage was deified in Mars, the god of war; music, poetry and culture in Apollo. Hermes instructed in oratory and in the graceful physical exercises of the Pælestra. Bacchus, or Evias (probably derived from *ενιος*), was the good-natured god of wine and revelry. Vulcan, whom some have identified as the Tubal-Cain of the Bible, was the god of blacksmiths; he fashioned the sword and the plowshare. Divine honors were equally divided with the fair sex. Hæra, or Juno, spouse and sister of Jupiter, was queen of heaven and the patroness of married women. Athene, or Minerva, sprang panoplied from the brain of Jupiter. She was the goddess of wisdom and instructed women in the industrious arts, rendering them skillful in the labors of the loom and in the use of the spindle and distaff. Diana, cold and chaste, a huntress, followed the chase in

dark woods, attended by fair virgins, and, secluded from rude eyes, bathed in the sparkling mountain stream. Venus Aphrodite, who rose from the foam of the sea, was the goddess of beauty, love and passion. Nor were her amours and intrigues confined to the ambrosial-eating gods. Naturally enough, Eros or Cupid—both terms signifying desire—was her son. Ceres, grand and beneficent, protected the growing crops. There was, besides, an almost limitless number of gods and goddesses and heroes and heroines, some of whom were converted into constellations in heaven, who occupied an inferior position in Grecian mythology; resembling in some respects the angelic hosts in the Hebrew Scriptures and the numerous saints of the Catholic Church. But while the winged messengers of Jehovah were solemn, sedate and austere personages, the satellites of Jupiter were eminently sociable and frequently hilarious in their intercourse with humanity. "By the exercise of his intellectual powers the Greek elevated and deified humanity. His worship of the gods did not take the form of abject and slavish terror." When he met a god even, contending in battle against him, he bravely struggled for victory. To reverence one's self (*αἰδεῖσθαι σέαυτον*) was a fundamental maxim of his education. Influenced by this ennobling teaching, the Greek attained the highest mental and physical development, and elevated the heroes of his race to divine honors. This never could have resulted had the imagination of Greece attributed to her deities the bloody and inhuman attributes of the gods of India. Hero-worship was unknown to the ancient religion of India, and there is no trace of it in Egyptian mythology. Herodotus says that the Persians differed from the

Greeks, inasmuch as they did not suppose the gods to have forms like men. These wide differences and divergence of religious conceptions tend to support the assumption that no true conception of the nature and attributes of the God of the Universe was, at any time, communicated to the primitive races of the earth, and favor the hypothesis that man's religious ideas in the dawn of his civilization were, in a great measure, if not wholly, suggested by the phenomena that surrounded him. The ultimate happiness of the Hindu, the very best thing that could happen to him, as he believed, was final extinction, in which there was no place for either hopes or fears, pleasures or pains, mental or physical exertion; where neither sun nor moon nor star rose or set—a solemn condition of silence and darkness, a realm of final and perfect nothingness—this he named Nirwana. Many indications of the apprehension of final extinction by death may be found both in the book of Job and in Ecclesiastes, as well as scattered through the older Hebrew writings. Job says to his "Comforters": "Are not my days few? Cease, then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness!" The grand simplicity of the religious ideas of the Indians of the North American continent is, as we regard it, the natural result of the simplicity of the lives and occupation of the aborigines. They lived almost solely by the chase; vast and unbroken prairies suggested ideas of unity, continuity and immensity. They had to struggle for existence with

no savage monsters. The deer, elk, buffalo and bear were easily slain. They had no savage gods, in consequence, to appease. Hence sacrificial offerings and an organized priesthood were unknown. They entertained dim and indefinite conceptions of a great Spirit, and their future heaven consisted of happy hunting grounds where game was abundant. The case of the Mexican Indians is an exception, but susceptible of explanation consistent with our hypothesis. The savage Goth of Northern Europe, whose life was passed in robbing, rapine and battle, entertained religious perceptions evolved from his own experience and suggested by his brutalizing environments. His heaven was a place of carousal where he quaffed strong drink from the skulls of his enemies slain in battle. He was not very far wrong who, inverting the aphorism, declared that "an honest god is the noblest work of man."

To investigate to what extent man's religious ideas have been suggested by the circumstances of his life and environments would be equally interesting and important in its bearing on modern theology, but is beyond this inquiry that precludes more than a passing allusion to the subject.

CHAPTER VII.

When the spread of Christianity began first to attract some attention, the religious system of Rome was rapidly undergoing the process of disintegration. The roof of the superstructure had grown too heavy for the columns that sustained it. Though the temples of the gods were still thronged with ostensible worshipers, though the altars still smoked with incense, though the favorite oracles were still consulted, and though the priesthood still bore the emblems of authority, yet the worship of the gods, once sacred and decent, had fallen into licentiousness and revelry. The philosophers, poets, orators and historical writers of Rome, though outwardly conforming to the popular worship, secretly despised and ridiculed it. They had lost all faith in the religious system that survived its usefulness. Four hundred years B. C., Socrates was, according to legal form, murdered, charged with corrupting the youth by teaching that there were no gods. He drank his hemlock, as a philosopher and good citizen should, when so ordered by the state.

The poison drank in his quiet prison cell by the best and grandest of all the sons that Greece has given to

humanity and immortality accomplished its mission. It taught, by a single expression, a lesson that dignified not only the Grecian character but our common humanity. No more beautiful picture has been given to the world than that drawn in the matchless prose of Xenophon, giving us a view of Socrates the Teacher, after his condemnation, quietly discoursing with his disciples on the great doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as though he stood, free as the air of free Greece, in the pleasant groves of Academus. His disciples who loved him hung with reverence upon the words that fell from their master and teacher. More to them were they than the oracles of the gods he had argued out of existence. Men of the highest reputation and most honorable position in the state gathered about him. They urged him to fly. They besought him not to permit the ingratitude of a base rabble to rob the world of his services. They represented that many cities would contend for the honor of receiving him after his flight from thankless Athens that could offer him nothing better than a cup of cold hemlock. But the arguments and entreaties of his friends moved him as little as the spray of the surf falling upon the cliff moves the rock-bound shore. He knew that it was his duty as a citizen to obey the laws, and therefore he deliberately preferred death to flight. It has been said that "Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus died like a god." It would be well in considering this language to bear in mind that it was not Socrates that said, in view of death, "Father, let this cup pass from me." When Greece had given to the world even one heroic soul who scorned life purchased by the sacrifice of principle, who embraced death as gladly as a tired

traveler welcomes rest and sleep at the end of a long day's journey, she demonstrated the height man is capable of attaining when his intellect is emancipated from the slavery of superstition. But the spirit of religious persecution was foreign to the Grecian character, and the death of Socrates on account of his religious teaching may be considered exceptional. While sacrilege and impiety were punishable both at Athens and Rome, yet, generally, the utmost liberality of thought and expression was freely tolerated. The religions of both Greece and Italy had no fixed metes or bounds. They were both constantly enlarging the number of gods and heroes to whom divine worship was paid. Not long after the increase of Christianity it was proposed at Rome to add the name of Jesus to the number of the lesser divinities, and the measure contemplated was only defeated by a technical objection on the part of the Senate.

The Jewish people — an important branch of the Semitic race—had, long previous to the advent of Christ, fallen into a position of almost complete political insignificance. Israel, neither by its conquests, literature nor political system had made any impression upon the world. Its history had been neither splendid nor remarkable. Its national unity was of very brief duration. Secession had rent it in twain. It suffered the fate of all divided people of a common origin devastated by fratricidal and foreign wars. It had repeatedly fallen under the dominion of the invader; and, saddest of all in the history of any race, had twice suffered deportation from its own land, bearing the yoke of captivity among strangers. The literature of no people contains a wail of

bitterer and more soul-piercing misery than is found in the Lamentations of Jeremiah. To what a terrible condition of national prostration had this ancient race been reduced when the strongest of their poets, Jeremiah, could thus pour out his heart in gall: "The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children. They were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.... Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of heaven. They pursued us upon the mountains and laid wait for us in the wilderness.... Remember, O Lord! what is come upon us; consider and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us. Our necks are under persecution; we labor and have no rest. We have given the hand to the Egyptians and to the Assyrians to be satisfied with bread. Our fathers have sinned and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us; there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand. We get our bread with the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness. Our skin was black like an oven, because of the terrible famine. They ravished the women in Zion and the maids in the cities of Judah. Princes are hanged up by their hand; the faces of elders were not honored. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head; woe unto us that we have sinned. For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are

dim. Because of the mountain of Zion which is desolate the foxes walk upon it." Yet when Israel had fallen into the hands of her enemies; when her altars were polluted, her magnificent temple razed to the ground, her priests slain and her prophets hiding in the wilderness or in mountain caverns—even then she had not wholly lost faith in her destiny; she cherished the hope that the Jehovah who had brought her out of the land of Egypt would at last restore her to the possession of a land flowing with milk and honey. Even when crushed to earth by suffering, "eating the bread of bitterness and drinking the water of affliction," seeing her national existence passing away, she still indulged in dreams of the coming Messiah, not in the character of a moral teacher, but as a conqueror, prince and deliverer. The Roman conquest of Judea had given the death blow to this expectation, though even after this event there were not wanting a few enthusiasts ambitious to enact the *role* of a Messiah. The distinguishing characteristic of the religion of the Jews was the possession of the monotheistic idea. The worship of the "I am," though disfigured by sacrificial service, elevated the Israelites above the contemporaneous and contiguous races. It must, however, be observed that monotheism was never popular. To the Israelite who sighed for participation in the idolatrous worship of the nations that surrounded him, Jehovah was only a god superior to gods of the neighboring races. Even Moses failed to grasp monotheism in all its solitary grandeur. He represented Jehovah as a jealous god, not giving his glory to another, greater and mightier than the gods of the surrounding nations, whose power was also recognized and feared. So well aware were

the spiritual rulers of the Jews of the tendency of the people to lapse into gross idolatry on the slighest provocation, that they prohibited the making of any graven image, or the likeness of anything in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. Though by this singular prohibition one of the noblest of arts remained undeveloped among the Jews, yet the spiritual idea—of probably more importance—received greater strength and held the people with a more enduring tenacity of grasp. No religious idea, except accompanied in its expression by rites and ceremonies, can ever become popular. Men of culture will, no doubt, derive more pleasure from the contemplation of the attributes of a supreme intelligence than they would from material representations or distortions of the divine principle. To them the conviction of reason and experience that the universe is governed by law affords more satisfaction than could be derived from scenic representations, curtained shrines hiding the awful presence of a god, perfumed incense, altars reeking with sacrificial blood, smoke of burnt offerings ascending in circling wreaths, pale-faced priests magnificently arrayed, bells and breastplates on which strange devices appear, lighted tapers and sounding waves of voluminous music. This is priestcraft, and this it is that enslaves the multitude.

The seer, when he desired to put his soul in communion with heaven, dream dreams weird and wild, see those visions that silenced the pulsation of his heart, hear the voice of God in the reeds shaken with the wind, or in the cataract leaping down the mountain side, went far apart from the din and bustle of busy life. He went out into the howling wilderness; he stood on the lonely

crag; he wept, he prayed, he fasted. Exhaustion fell upon him. The heat by day oppressed him, the dews of night chilled him. He struggled with his own nature as he would with a savage beast that sought to rend him. His physical energies succumbed to watching and fasting. Imagination overshadowed reason. Then it was, in ecstatic condition, that he stood before kings and rulers, and hurled his fierce denunciations against the enemies of Israel and Jehovah. In estimating the character of Hebraistic theology we must bear in mind that the influence of the prophets was even paramount to that of the priesthood. The "seers" (*nabi* in the Semitic) were essentially the champions of the people, denouncing alike, oftentimes, kingcraft and priestcraft. Samuel, the first of the seers, exercised undisputed sway. He was the great king-maker in Israel. Yielding to the popular cry, he allowed the people to adopt the regal form of government. He himself made the selection, and, considering that he was under Divine guidance, his choice does not appear to have been a very happy one, either for himself, Jehovah or the people. Samuel was jealous of the power of Saul, and continually urged him to the performance of tasks full of danger and difficulty. The humane refusal of Saul to carry out to the bitter end the entire destruction of Amalek furnished the prophet with a coveted opportunity of withdrawing his support from Saul.

Repeatedly throughout Jewish history we find the prophets arraying their influence against the kings. The theocratic idea was inimical to the interests of royalty. Under the rule of the prophets, Israel had no military strength. Neither had she commercial intercourse and

exchange with the nations of the earth. So complete was the political servitude of the people that, in the time of Samuel, Saul and his son Jonathan were the only men in all Israel who possessed either sword or spear. There was not even a blacksmith in all the land; when a Jew desired to have a plowshare, coulter, ax or mattock, he had to go to the Philistines to have this work performed. Wonderful to relate, they did possess a file, as we are informed, "yet they had a file for the mattocks and for the coulters and for the forks and for the axes to sharpen the goads." The abler rulers of the people sought to wean them from the theocratic idea, and tried to teach them that their independence as a nation was to be obtained and preserved rather by the creation of a disciplined armed force than by reliance upon supernatural interferences. Though they never rudely shocked the religious sentiment by any abnegation of the influence of Jehovah, yet, practically, they ignored it when they counted their forces on entering into a war with other races. David, a man of war from his youth, appreciated the efficacy of a well equipped and disciplined force. To ascertain the military strength of the people, he ordered a census to be taken. This enlightened measure of internal policy at once provoked the hostility and bitter denunciation of the prophet who was sent specially by Jehovah to pronounce divine condemnation of this impious presumption. By enumerating the people and ascertaining the military strength of the nation, David was blasphemously ignoring the efficacy of the outstretched arm of Jehovah, who had brought his children through the Red Sea without wetting the soles of their feet, who had caused the sun and the moon to stand still for their

sakes, who had rained down stones from heaven upon their enemies, who had driven out before them the inhabitants of the mountains, though "he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron" (Judges i, 19). David, in recognizing the fact, like a great captain of modern times, that "God fought with the strongest battalion," was guilty of unpardonable infidelity. He was punished for this wickedness of his by the destruction of seventy thousand of the people by a pestilence; which seems a little conflicting with any rational view of divine justice. We are not helped much towards any solution of this enigma of Divine dealing with his creatures by being informed in the opening of the narrative that "again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, saying, Go number Israel and Judah." It would seem, at first glance, to the poor uninspired creature who exercises the reasoning faculties that distinguish him from the brute, that this proceeding smacks a little both of injustice and hypocrisy. If the God of the Universe wished to punish the Jews by carrying off seventy thousand of them by pestilence, or in any other way equally agreeable to his feelings, it is within the bounds of probability to imagine that he could have done so—and we proceed further to assert that he ought to have done so—without descending to a miserable subterfuge like the one here narrated. It will not do to tell us that God's notions of justice are different from ours. No sanction of God can make a lie as respectable as the truth. No divine approval of hypocrisy can make it one of the virtues. A lie and a subterfuge attributed to Jehovah are more infamous than when coming from the

apocryphal Devil whom the Scriptures style the "father of lies," though they have never fastened the parentage of one upon him. The Hebrew story of the creation tells us that it was Satan, not Jehovah, who told "our first parents" that eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge would make them "as gods, knowing good and evil," and never did a god or demon utter a prediction that has been so gloriously verified.

Solomon, too, sought to break down the barriers of exclusiveness that the theocratic policy of Judaism had erected. He made, despite the denunciations of the prophets, matrimonial alliances with Egypt; and, as the number of his recognized wives amounted to about three hundred, it is probable that his selections extended to every race and nation with which he came in contact. The Queen of Sheba, who appears to have been a lady of equal independence of thought and action, visited the greatest ruler the Jewish race ever knew, and doubtless had the sphere of her knowledge and experience increased by contact with this wise king and man of cosmopolitan views. Hiram, king of Tyre, brought him gold from Ophir; and Solomon dispatched a navy to Tarshish, in company with one of Hiram's fleets, which returned, after a three years' cruise, bringing back "gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks."

Previous to the time of Solomon the Israelites were satisfied with the worship of Jehovah, celebrated with little, if any, external pomp. The humble ark in which their God once dwelt was carried about with them from place to place, as the shifting fortunes of the race rendered necessary. They even brought it into battle with them; and on one occasion it was captured by the Phil-

istines and placed in the house of the god Dagon. Solomon, having doubtless seen the magnificent structures of the Egyptians, was induced to build an imposing temple to the tutelary divinity of his own race at Jerusalem, and, alas! introduced the worship of foreign deities. He is presumably the author of a very amorous poem, smacking of licentious flavor, called the "Song of Solomon." It is pruriently sensual in many of its passages. This, however, has not deterred Christians from classing it among the "inspired" works of revelation. They even proceed further, and, regardless of decency of comparison, assert that this grossly impure and immoral effusion is a finely-wrought description of the love existing between Christ the bridegroom and the Church the bride! The idea is one calculated to excite disgust! Fancy for a moment this royal debauchée, who never restrained a licentious passion or impulse, whose seraglio was filled with a thousand women, under the guise of a love-song portraying the character of the poor despised and crucified Nazarene, whose figure, standing on the pedestal of nineteen hundred years, has thrown its shadow over half the world!

Solomon, too, endeavored to assimilate the Jewish policy to that of the partially civilized nations surrounding them. They were behind the latter in political institutions, in military efficiency, in literature, and in the peaceful pursuits of agriculture, trade and commerce. He even adopted for a time the religious worship of his powerful ally Egypt. But the spirit of resistance to all innovation, instigated by the prophets, as usual, proved too strong for him. They despised all literature, art and culture—so much so that the making of a graven

image was a sin against God. They constantly insisted that Jehovah had forever separated his children from all the nations of the earth, and that awful vengeance and utter extinction would inevitably follow any attempt at departure from the Divine command. Their religion was the most exclusive on earth. They neither sought nor desired converts to their faith. Their God was mightier and greater than all gods: he was God of gods and Lord of lords, King of kings. Into the Holiest of Holies, where He dwelt, the great high-priest entered once a year, unaccompanied by mortal, and what he saw and heard there was never revealed to the vulgar; he even veiled his face when he came out from the awful interview with Jehovah, lest the glory reflected on his face should strike the multitude stone dead. The Jewish race has not yet forgotten the impressions made in its infancy. For five thousand years it has with jealous care preserved its worship of Jehovah, the monotheistic idea, and the sacred skeleton of theocratic government. It looks with ineffable disdain upon the modern distortion of its religion in the Christian faith. The doctrines of the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, and the salvation of the world through his blood, are to it as repulsive and foreign at present as were of old the mythologies of Egypt, Assyria and Greece.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

Christianity, as a phase of the history of the human race, is wonderful in all its aspects. It has inseparably interwoven itself for two thousand years with the existence of nations and individuals. It is difficult to be just to this great factor in the civilization of mankind. It has often filled the earth with blood; it has, too, inculcated noble lessons of charity. It has dwarfed intellectual growth; it has also made the burdens of life more tolerable by opening up vistas of everlasting happiness. It has roasted over slow fires men of free thought and free speech, and reddened scaffolds with innocent blood; but it has sometimes stood as a barrier between the mailed oppressors and robbers and their defenseless serfs. It has domineered over the conscience of the individual; but it has elevated marriage to the dignity of a holy sacrament. It has often usurped authority in the state and set the priest above the king; but it has also established hospitals for the sick, and entered lazar houses,

like an angel of light, to carry the consolations of religion to plague-smitten dying men. It has been insatiable and unscrupulous in the acquisition of wealth; but it has built magnificent temples, ornamented with the glorious trophies of art, for the poor. It has shut men up in horrible dungeons and tortured them for daring to enunciate an astronomical truth; but it has braved every species of suffering and privation in carrying what it believed to be Divine truth to savages across stormy seas. It has denied to believers the right of the exercise of reason in matters of faith; but, at the same time, it has relieved both educated and uneducated from the trouble and anguish of barren and profitless speculations. It has peopled hell with human souls suffering endless torture; but it has proclaimed the immortality of the soul. It has degraded personal respect by flagellations and penances; but it has apotheosized suffering in the person of the crucified Nazarene.

The Reformation has atoned for many ecclesiastical cruelties, open and secret, individual and official. To the monkish drones of the Middle Ages is the world indebted for the preservation of many noble and priceless works of antiquity. Religious sentiment of some kind must associate itself with every social system and individual life. So generally admitted is this statement that it has been sarcastically asserted that if Christianity did not exist, it would be necessary for the benefit of the world that a system of religion similar to it should be invented.

In any inquiry into the origin of Christianity and the assumptions upon which rest the record of the miracles of the New Testament, it must be admitted that of inde-

pendent testimony we have almost nothing. We have no historical testimony of an independent character contemporaneous with the gospel narratives. We have a very few doubtful allusions to the public life of Jesus and his work in the remains of one or two Latin writers contiguously subsequent. Pliny's famous letter to Trajan is really the only outside testimony of the noticeable growth of Christianity at a period not very far removed from the death of Jesus. Of Jesus Christ himself we know nothing except what may be gathered from the gospels and epistles. In neither the historical writers of Greece and Rome, nor in any of the poetical works extant in the Greek or Latin tongue of the time in which Jesus is supposed to have lived, is there the slightest or remotest allusion to his existence, his career, his alleged miracles, his death, or his resurrection from the dead. Born in an obscure portion of the earth, never moving out of the province in which he passed his youth, never visiting Athens or Rome, never having accomplished anything in literature, philosophy, art, science, arms or political life, totally unacquainted with the great men of his age, it is within the bounds of moderation to assume that, were it not for the spread of Christianity, the narratives of the four evangelists and the epistolary correspondence of the apostles with the different churches, the world would never have preserved the name of Jesus of Nazareth. So that all that can possibly be known concerning him, whose name now is familiar as the sunlight in every household in every civilized land, is contained in the meager story of his life and death to be found in the gospels. All inquiry, then, of any practical character must be concentrated upon the gospel story of

Jesus. The question of prime importance to be settled, and to which all others are subordinate, is that of the godship of Jesus. Whether Jesus was a man of like passions with every other human being, or whether he was the Ruler and Creator of the boundless Universe, must be settled by every man before he can entertain any profound and well-settled conviction. There is no compromising this question. It will not do to assert that he was the son of God in some higher and more mysterious sense than every gifted creature is who devotes himself to the elevation of his race. He was either a man, a myth, or a god. It will not do to assert that if we believe that he was the son of God, or if all the world believes it, he therefore was or is God. Our belief or the belief of all the world will not alter the fact one way or another. The inquiry is not devoid of either solemnity or importance. If Jesus of Nazareth, who, two thousand years ago, footsore and houseless, went through the wheat-fields of Palestine and plucked the ears to satisfy his hunger; who sat by the wayside well and begged a drink of water from a poor Samaritan woman of such dubious reputation for chastity that his disciples marveled that he talked with her; who loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus their brother, and ever found a brother's welcome at their humble home; who constantly associated with the lowest classes; whose intimate and familiar friends were not the great, the gifted and the learned, but humble fishermen and tax-collectors of very moderate acquirements, and little, if any, book-learning; who began his public teaching—excluding the episode of his appearance in the temple—in rural hamlets, sometimes by the lake-shore, on the mountain, or stretched

beneath the fig-tree and olive; who, after three years of public life, was, by the indiscreet zeal of his friends and the taunts of his enemies, pushed forward to Jerusalem, where, by the boldness of his teaching, his denunciation of shams and hypocrisies, and the foolish assumption for him, by his followers, of a regal title, he incurred the hatred of the Jews and the suspicion of the Romans; and who finally brought a painful career to an abrupt close by death inflicted in a most shameful and agonizing form—if this man, whose life is so full of obscurity, was in reality the God, Maker and Sustainer of the Universe, then, indeed, does an awful responsibility rest upon the mortal who approaches any inquiry into his life, character and actions. Yet no subject falling within the domain of human investigation must be avoided because of the consequences attending such inquiry. It is too late now to say to any human soul struggling after light and knowledge, "thus far shalt thou go and no farther." The only barrier that can obstruct any inquiry is the intervention of insurmountable physical obstacles and the limited capacity of the human understanding.

Let us have all the light possible and at any cost. Though we should lose faith and hope, and the dearest illusions of life—that is itself almost an illusion—let us know all that can be known while the lifeblood is warmly beating through our hearts, and while the sunlight of knowledge still stands for us above the horizon: "for there is no knowledge nor device in the grave, nor understanding in the land where all things are forgotten." But the priests of all religions and the ministers of "Revelation," who are all interested in the preservation of organized churches, are ever ready to resist any investi-

gation that seeks to uncover the foundations upon which their faith and religious ceremonies are built. To those patiently and industriously striving to bring some gold to the surface, covered with the rubbish of two thousand years of priestcraft and ignorance, they cry: "Are you specially fitted to conduct such an investigation? What are your acquirements? Can you speak Hebrew with the same facility as your mother tongue? Do you dream in Attic Greek and say your prayers in Latin? Have you made ecclesiastical history a study from youth to old age? Do you know what views the Church Fathers for fifteen centuries held concerning some disputed passages of Scripture, and the status of certain books?" To this it may be replied that though a knowledge of ancient literature is a most graceful acquirement, and reveals treasures of thought whose beauty is often marred by imperfection of translation, yet it requires no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, or even Latin, to form an opinion as to whether dead men have been raised to life, and those long sleeping in the graves walked about the streets of Jerusalem, "being seen of many." No knowledge of ecclesiastical history will help to explain to the unsanctified how a man walked upon the waves of the stormy sea, or how five thousand people were fed by five loaves of bread and two small fishes, and twelve basketsful of fragments collected from the repast. One might master all that has been written on the Greek particle and yet fail to understand how the Devil could take the Creator of the Universe up to the pinnacle of the temple and gravely tempt the Almighty to fall down and worship the Devil, offering as a reward for compliance with this diabolical proposition the sovereignty of all the king-

doms of the earth and their glory, which the Devil could not bestow, and which God must have known belonged to himself and not to the Devil. No amount of antiquarian research will render intelligible the cursing by Jesus of a fig-tree that bore no fruit out of season, and the immediate withering away of the fig-tree consequent upon the curse pronounced against its sterility. When we are asked to accept as true statements of this and similar character that are repugnant to the humblest exercise of our reasoning faculties and the daily experience of our existence, the fact that we are or are not entitled to write after our names a university degree will make very little difference in helping us to arrive at some conclusion consistent with reason and the lessons of human experience.

No man of sense will desire to belittle the pleasures of learning or underrate its importance in the civilization of the world. Yet it must be admitted that, for the most part, the heroes of humanity, the great warriors, the wise kings, the astute statesmen, the bold adventurers in unknown seas, the inventors of printing, of the steam-engine and telegraph, and the men who have given impulse to the great forward movements in social and moral reform, were not mere bookworms, but vigorous men with large human sympathies and great strength of will.

We have a class who, after, in most cases, years of preparatory study, undertake, or are, in the language of the profession, "called" to the office of public teachers of religion. In the older European universities the clergy are supposed to have undergone a course of instruction fitting them for the work not only of public ministry but

for investigating the evidence upon which the assumptions of Christianity are capable of proof. This latter duty has, as a general rule, been shamelessly neglected. In the great conflict now being waged between Science and Religion, the anointed and chosen ministers of religion are ominously silent.

The ablest champions of orthodoxy, as well as its fiercest assailants, are laymen. It is true that Bishop Colenso broke the ecclesiastical fetters that held him in mental restraint; but the persecution, both legal and popular, that pursued him deterred others afflicted with the same doubts that drove him into an investigation of the Mosaic account of the creation and the miraculous, leading to his open repudiation of the inspirational theory, from following the course he adopted. It is much to be feared that the teachers of religion will never greatly disturb themselves or the world by any very startling or profound investigation of the grounds of Christian belief. Their interests are so interwoven with the existing order of things that they can hardly be expected to rise superior to selfish considerations. They are, too, as a rule, unfit for the task. If one of them does enter the field of biblical criticism, he does so, not for the purpose of procuring new evidence or passing impartially upon such as we have, but with a view to repair the breaches already made and erect a great Chinese wall to prevent the incursion of iconoclasts and levelers. In their attempts to fortify their position they disregard the ordinary rules of warfare, and hurl upon the heads of their assailants the foulest epithets that the ecclesiastical mud-engines can belch forth. No matter how pure and blameless may be a man's life, the moment

he questions the biblical story he is branded an atheist, infidel, blasphemer, a dangerous man and an enemy to society. He may have genius, but this only makes his crime of independence the more heinous. No longer able to consign him to the rack, the faggot and the dungeon, as in the good pious old times gone by, the church militant now contents herself with attempting to render him infamous and socially an outcast. This even, little as it is, is not effected with the same ease as formerly.

Churchmen are equally unjust in their attempted interpretation of Scripture. They strain and twist passages out of all shape and meaning to support the most extravagant views. The plainest passages of the Hebrew Scriptures, having reference and application to events current with their utterance, are regarded as prophetic descriptions of the spiritual Messiah. Thus Melchisedec, the priest who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, was typical of, if not identical with, the true Christ manifested to the world in the person of Jesus, the son of the carpenter. When the three angels (?) appeared at Abraham's tent-door in the cool of the day, and Abraham in the Oriental manner addressed them as "my Lord," biblical commentators discover in this a proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. Examination will disclose the fact that even the often-quoted passages of Isaiah—denominated the evangelical prophet—triumphantly insisted upon as descriptive of the Savior, had really not the slightest reference, directly or indirectly, to Jesus of Nazareth, but had sole and primary reference to some person or event of prominent importance in the current history of the Jewish race. Cyrus, for the most part, and not the poor despised Nazarene of subsequent

ages, is the subject of Isaiah's "inspired" verse. The first few verses of the forty-fifth chapter of this book settle the question beyond controversy: "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings to open before him the two leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight. I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron, and I will give thee the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by name, am the God of Israel." We care not now to consider the anthropomorphic picture here presented of the God of Israel engaged in smashing two leaved gates of brass, and twisting bars of iron, as a display of his power for his anointed Cyrus; we only remark that if the name of Cyrus had not been specially mentioned here, there hardly remains a doubt that this description would have been appropriated by the Church and applied altogether to Jesus. So far had this speculative application of the older Hebrew Scriptures to the character and person of Jesus been carried, that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews exercises the most refined species of ingenuity in establishing the superiority of Christ's ministers to the priesthood of Levi. The writer, by a bold exercise of the imagination, assumes that that mysterious character called Melchisedec, mentioned casually in Genesis, and who is dismissed in briefest mention as "priest of the most high God," was actually the God who was afterward manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Having, by this splendid conceit, established

this fact, the writer proceeds to show that Abraham, the progenitor of Levi, meeting Melchisedec, returning from the slaughter of the kings, paid tithes to Melchisedec, or to Jesus, who was not born until a few thousand years later, and argues that therefore the Levitical order of priesthood was inferior to that of Jesus; forgetting, for the moment, that if Jesus was the descendant of Abraham, as is claimed for him, he, too, being "in the loins of his father Abraham,"—to use the scriptural phrase—must have paid tithes to himself! Christians may be satisfied with this kind of argument, but men of ordinary understanding will condemn it as despicable sophism unworthy of a moment's consideration.

The gospel narrative informs us that, after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary went down to Egypt. There was apparently no compelling cause for the undertaking of this journey; but the gospel writer, with great candor, informs us that this was done in order that the prophecy "Out of Egypt have I called my son" might be fulfilled. This, it will be admitted, is a novel method of fulfilling prophecy. Almost endless instances might be adduced of the adoption of this method of the application of prophecies to persons and subjects to which they had not the remotest reference.

When the propagators of Christianity found it necessary to attempt to reconcile the strange aspects of the Christian faith with the expectations entertained by the Jews of restoration of sovereign and national power, they abandoned the plain meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures. For a temporal prince and warrior they substituted a spiritual Christ. For the kingdom of Israel they gave the recalcitrant Jews the larger, loftier and more spa-

cious but less tangible kingdom of Heaven. The Canaan of their early bloody wars became the shining shore of the better land beyond the grave. The New Jerusalem, whose streets were to be paved with pure gold, was not to be found upon any map of Palestine. Even Jordan had undergone a change. It was no longer the dear old familiar, almost sacred river whose sensitive waters ran from the touch of the priest's feet; it was no longer only the beautiful river by whose pleasant banks children sported, young men and maidens sipped the intoxicating elixir of life's opening dream, or where the aged patriarch and white-haired prophet sat, and as they looked upon its swift-flowing surface saw mirrored the picture of the far-off past and the fleeting present. It was more than all this under the new dispensation. "Saints" now sang of meeting on the other side of Jordan, of gathering at the river, and wandering in the pleasant fields of the spiritual Canaan, in much the same spirit as the exile dreams of the lakes and the mountains, the rivers and the valleys, and the surf-beaten shore of his far-off native land. But the unpoetic and practical Jew entertained no such conceptions. His vision was obscured by no such allegorical clouds. Jordan was to him a stream, sacred, it is true, by its association with the history of his race, but only a stream. Canaan was, it is true, in the flowery language of the Orientalists, a land flowing with milk and honey, which he had obtained possession of not by prayers, but by hard fighting; and if he entertained at times—which is very doubtful—dreams of a life beyond the grave, he never thought of encumbering himself with the Zions, Jordans, Canaans and Jerusalems of his earthly pilgrimage. It is only the Christian who,

asserting that God is a spirit, yet with strange inconsistency ascribes to him the passions, vices and virtues of humanity.

The existence of any fact is totally independent of any views that may be entertained concerning it. The sun would shine with its wonted brightness, and rise and set with its accustomed regularity, whether or not men existed upon the surface of the earth to enjoy its light and trace its apparent course in the heavens. Earth's rivers would forever flow and mingle their waters, fresh from mountains and valleys, with the sea's salt waves, whether they bore upon their surface the magnificent monuments of naval architecture, freighted with the products of human industry, or swept forward, into the currents of the ocean, rocks, trees and vegetable matter, unconscious of change.

In dealing with the record of the "miraculous" phase of Christianity, some modern writers of great learning and eminence, animated doubtless by an amiable disposition, would sacrifice truth itself, lest a shock should be given to the religious sentiment by the unequivocal assertion of what they conceive to be the truth.

Renan's "Life of Jesus" reads more like a romance than a scholarly and philosophical investigation of the most important subject that can engage the attention of any rational human being. While eminently suggestive, he almost shrinks from the duty of drawing legitimate and logical conclusions from his own premises. Having demonstrated the physical impossibility involved in the acceptance of the theory of the resurrection of Jesus, yet, with reprehensible levity, he admits that Christ did rise

from the dead and ascend into heaven *for those who believe it.* This is trifling with a controversy only one side of which can be true. Either Jesus triumphantly trampling upon physical impossibilities, asserting his superiority to all laws of nature, conquered the King of Terrors in his own gloomy and lightless stronghold, and ascended bodily into the heavens, wherever they may be; or, after a heroic and godlike life, crowned with thorns that a thankless world ever binds upon the brows of the emancipators of humanity, scourged with the stripes that ignorance and bigotry ever inflict upon the forerunners of new eras of larger freedom and fuller moral and intellectual development, his physical existence underwent the same change and was subject to the inevitable conditions that are inseparable from human life. Either one or the other of these theories must be true; both certainly cannot. The thought of the present day will not be satisfied with faith or sentiment; it wants facts, and facts only, no matter how many and dearly-cherished beliefs the light of investigation may dissipate forever.

At the very threshold of an investigation into the claims of a religious belief founded upon the assumption of miraculous interpositions, one is met by a protest against the propriety of such an investigation. It is often said, in substance: "Suppose you succeed, which, after all, is extremely difficult, in weakening the trusting faith of the best people in the world in the assumed truths of Christianity, what do you gain thereby? Do you not take from them the bread of life and offer them a stone? Why rob life, not very pleasant under the best circumstances, of a harmless, nay, beneficent, delusion, if it be a delusion? Assuming even that there is

no life beyond the present, why trouble yourself and others by perplexing doubts? Let things be as they are and let human faith flow on as heretofore in its well-defined channel. Why engage in the most thankless office in the world—that of intimating that long-established faith may be based upon erroneous teaching? Why vex even your brief existence with the great problems that the wisest men leave to others? Life at best is short, and yet it offers some pleasure to the man not overburthened with thought who follows in the crowd of respectable mediocrity and generously pays others who professionally do his religious thinking for him."

To this it may be answered that the noblest and happiest exercise of the faculties of man's higher being is in the investigation of truth for truth's sake. The pleasures of sense perish with the using. The "scorners of the ground" made this discovery even long before the royal Hebrew sensualist, who, having drank life to the lees, declared that all was vanity. The knowledge of the truth robs life of nothing worth cherishing. It alone confers dignity upon man, and enables him, unfettered by the rust-eaten chains of superstition and unappalled by spiritual anathemas, to comprehend his place in nature and accept with decent composure the inevitable. Were the pioneers of humanity timorous as to where truth might lead and how far from ancient landmarks investigation would carry them, the progress of our race would have been impeded for many centuries; the tomahawk, the bow and arrow and string of beads would represent our civilization to-day, and not the telescope, the telegraph, the steam-engine and printing-press. By the very condition of his being man is imperatively urged

into the field of investigation. A knowledge of the physical laws in conformity with which his existence is rendered pleasant or even tolerable can never be detrimental to the individual. So a knowledge of the spiritual and moral laws that govern him is inseparable from his improvement and progress in his social relations. As his religious conceptions, and the forms and ceremonies by which he expresses them, are controlling elements in his civilization, in the highest sense of the term, it is apparent that it becomes the duty of every rational creature to apply the attention to the investigation of religious claims that he does to the ordinary interests and avocations of life. It is difficult for one accustomed from the very dawn of the reasoning faculties to place unquestioned reliance in the assumptions of "Revelation," and taught to regard with reverence the religious ceremonies in which spiritual conceptions have been preserved and crystalized, to divest himself utterly of all bias, and enjoy a condition of mental indifference so necessary to fearless investigation. The painful earnestness with which we sometimes endeavor to persuade ourselves and others that we are perfectly unprejudiced affords the best evidence of the permanence of early impressions. In an investigation into the presumed truths of "Revelation" it is useless to assert that only certain portions of it fall within the scope of inquiry, while other portions must be accepted without question or hesitation. For better or worse—and we believe assuredly for the better—the world wishes to know all that may be known of the fundamental principles and historical evidences upon which revealed religion is based. True, the unthinking and the ignorant may, for many years to come, continue to ac-

cept as absolute verities propositions abandoned as untenable by their leaders; but no system can long survive its condemnation by the intellect, ability and culture of the ripest scholars and independent thinkers of the age.

CHAPTER II.

Leaving the claims to inspiration put forward on behalf of the older Hebrew Scriptures, let us inquire whether or not the New Testament writings conform to what we should consider the essentials of a divine communication, if any such has ever been given to man.

Inspiration, in its ordinary acceptation and biblical sense, we may assume to be the communication of knowledge of some kind, which could not otherwise be obtained, to a human being by God, who we may also assume to be a spiritual being having no bodily or terrestrial existence, and which man could never have evolved from his own inner consciousness or have acquired by observation of the externals surrounding him.

The power of limited prediction must not be confounded with what "inspiration" calls prophecy. For example, by a happy guess, or by an accurate survey of political events, past and passing, one might predict, and be verified in the prediction, that ten years hence the Empire might be restored in France or royalty abolished in England. Yet the verification of either prediction or both of them would by no means argue the em-

ployment of divine wisdom miraculously conferred. Again, "Revelation" is only valuable when it communicates truths that the world needs to know, is bettered by knowing, and which were not discoverable by the exercise of the reasoning faculties.

A "Revelation" claiming to come from the author of all truth must be absolutely perfect. In it confusion, and, least of all, contradiction, should find no place. In investigating the origin of Christianity, from the biblical accounts, we find inextricable confusion in the narration of the most important events. Mark, without any prefatory remarks, passes over in utter silence the infancy, youth and early manhood of Jesus, beginning his sketch of the public ministry of Christ at the period of the imprisonment of John, and introduces Jesus as entering on his public career preaching by the shore of the sea of Galilee, and numbering among the first converts to his faith two fishermen, Simon and Andrew. Matthew begins the genealogy of Jesus at Abraham and traces it down to Joseph, the husband of Mary; "of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ." Luke, after indulging in some prefatory remarks, disclaiming, by imputation, any other than natural and ordinary sources of information, commences by saying, "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph which was the son of Heli," etc., and traces the genealogy of Jesus up to Adam, "which was the son of God." Luke makes Jesus to have descended from David through Nathan; Matthew makes him descended from David through Solomon. Matthew says (i, 17): "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from

David unto the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations"; making thus in all forty-two generations by Matthew's count from Abraham to Jesus. By turning to Luke, and ascending the genealogical tree, we find, by actual enumeration, the number of generations from Jesus to Abraham to be fifty-four. Here, then, in these two accounts exists a difference of twelve generations. Both certainly cannot be divinely inspired, since they involve a discrepancy and contradiction irreconcilable by any hypothesis, however ingenious. A little further on we are confronted with another difficulty. Jesus, "according to the flesh, was the son of David." Joseph, according to the "orthodox" view, was not the true parent of Jesus. He was only the nominal husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. If Jesus were the son of God, and not born into the world in accordance with the ordinary laws of procreation, common-sense as well as a moment's reflection would suggest that the world is, and ought to be, totally indifferent to the genealogy of Joseph, who is a mere figurehead and amiable appendage in the group of the "holy family." If Jesus was not the son of Joseph, in the natural sense in which every male child is the son of his father, there exists no necessity or excuse for the insertion in the sacred records of the genealogy of Joseph. Obviously, if the "inspired" writers desired to have traced the descent of Jesus from David, they ought to have shown that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and not Joseph, was descended from the royal house of David. This they have utterly failed to do, leaving their failure inexplicable—all the more so as it does not seem that

they ever entertained the new doctrine of the Catholic Church of the "immaculate conception" of the Virgin Mary herself.

Without adverting to the physical absurdity involved in the account of the supernatural birth of Jesus, let us refer, for a moment, to the gospel narration of this marvelous story. Matthew, i, 18, and following: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily; but while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost, and she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins. *Now, all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us.* Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son, and he called his name Jesus." From this account it must be conceded that the story of the miraculous birth of Jesus is based upon the unsupported statement of Matthew and a dream of Joseph. We are not informed that this miraculous birth was part of a divine programme laid down for the salvation of mankind; but

"all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord of the prophet." Turning to the prophecy here referred to, let us quote from the seventh chapter of Isaiah: "And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it; but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind. Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-Jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field, and say unto him, Take heed and be quiet, fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands: for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria and of the son of Remaliah, because Syria, Ephraim and the son of Remaliah have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah and vex it; and let us make a breach therein for us and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal. Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and *within three score and five years shall Ephraim be broken that it be not a people.* And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. Moreover, the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will

not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David: Is it a small thing for you to weary men; but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. *Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.*"

We have quoted this passage in full from Isaiah lest it might be charged that we have given an improper construction to an isolated passage of Scripture. Is it not clear as the sunlight to the humblest intelligence, from the perusal of this passage of Scripture, that the sign of a virgin bringing forth a son, mentioned by the prophet Isaiah, had sole reference to an event in Jewish history long anterior to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, and totally unconnected with the marvelous career of the founder of Christianity? Can it be questioned that this passage had not the slightest allusion to the Christ of the New Testament, in either his true character as the son of man, or his accepted character as a wondrous combination of God and man? What butter and what honey was he to eat that he might know how to refuse the evil and choose the good? Is not this utterly senseless? According to the orthodox theory, Jesus was born without sin. Neither butter nor honey, as a dietary arrangement, could give him any knowledge of either good or evil. He knew all things before he was born, when he was born, and in his infancy, youth and manhood. He was absolutely a perfect being, the God of the limitless

Universe, incarnate. What latitude of imagination or perversion of the ordinary meaning of human language can apply this prophecy—so called—to the author of the Sermon on the Mount? Was Jesus ever, in the New Testament, called Emmanuel? What land was forsaken by both her kings before the child Jesus, by eating butter and honey, knew how to refuse the evil and choose the good? Is not this nothing but a painful effort on the part of the zealous author of this imperfect and meager biography of Jesus to apply an obscure allusion to a disastrous juncture in Jewish history in support of the pretensions put forth to sustain the story of the supernatural birth of Jesus? Again, Joseph is made to undertake a journey with the infant Jesus into Egypt, in order that another prophecy, so called, might be fulfilled: "Out of Egypt have I called my son"; the full passage being, "When *Israel* was a child I loved him; out of Egypt have I called my son." This manufacturing of fulfillment of prophecy, in order to make the life of Jesus harmonize with obscure allusions, called prophetical, is everywhere apparent throughout the New Testament writings. The probability is that in the original sketches they found no place, but were subsequently clumsily interpolated by zealots in order to present a plausible argument in favor of the Messianic claims of Jesus.

The account of the nativity of Jesus as given by Luke differs very materially from that of Matthew. After the introduction of the wonderful episode of Zacharias and Elizabeth, which bears on its face evidence of the purpose for which it was gotten up, we are told that, in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to announce to Mary, then espoused to Joseph, the signal

honor conferred upon her in being designated as the mother of him "who shall be great and shall be called the son of the highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David." The angel Gabriel, who had also been visiting Elizabeth, informs Mary of the situation of the former, who in her old age was about to become the mother of a man whose career was only less remarkable, as a popular teacher, than that of Jesus. Luke omits altogether the story of the appearance of the angel to Joseph in a dream, but more than compensates for the omission by making Mary—an uneducated Jewish peasant girl—utter a remarkably fine piece of composition, still deservedly popular in the religious services of the Church. Luke narrates the miraculous announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds watching their flocks by night. Matthew, however —which Luke omits—narrates the journey of the wise men of the East, following a star moving through the heavens until it finally stood over the house where the infant Jesus was sheltered. We do not know what measure of faith, unsustained by any testimony whatever, is necessary to enable reasonable men to believe that a star moved through the heavens and then stood directly over a particular spot. Such a phenomenon would derange the whole stellar system, involving probably the destruction of this world and others; besides, granting even the appearance of a star in such a mission possible, and overlooking the absurdity of employing a star to perform the ordinary work of a human guide, yet we are presented with the further impossibility of a star in the heavens indicating with sufficient accuracy any portion of the earth's surface under it within the radius of a few

miles! To give credence to such a narrative is to surrender every exercise of reason and thought. To give credence to a statement bearing on its face such stupendous absurdity, upon mere legendary testimony, involves such a degradation of the understanding as no man of ordinary capacity could have voluntarily descended to, had not implicit belief in the truth of the Scriptures formed the basis of his early spiritual education.

We do not think that in justice they who refuse to give credence to the miraculous legends of either the Old or New Testament Scriptures should be required to furnish proof of their mythical character; notwithstanding the fact that so respectable an authority in matters of legal evidence as Mr. Greenleaf asserts that the burden of proof lies upon those who deny the assumed truth of the miracles of the Scriptures. All ancient literature abounds in myths. Take away from the poetry of Greece and Rome its mythical element and little remains. Were we constantly called upon to disprove every legend of Greece and Rome, not to mention the more ancient mythologies of Egypt and India, we would undertake an endless and profitless task. Admitting that miracles are possible, how, for example, could we from contemporaneous testimony disprove the allegation of the beautiful allegorical fable that Athene, the goddess of Wisdom, did not spring panoplied from the brain of Jupiter, or that Vulcan was not lamed for life in consequence of his expulsion from heaven and fall upon the island of Lemnos; or, even coming down to what may, comparatively, be considered historic times, that Romulus and Remus were not the sons of Mars by a vestal virgin, were not cast into the Tiber and nursed by a female wolf; or that

Numa did not receive visits and instruction from the nymph Egeria? We cannot, from any contradictory testimony current when these fables were generally accepted as true, disprove all or any of these legends. Can we even disprove the miracles of the Koran from any opposing concurrent testimony? They, and the wondrous narrations of the Vedas of India, have for ages been accepted as true, and become the foundations of great religious systems held in complete veneration by millions of the human race for ages. The worshipers of Brahma and the followers of Mahomet, to-day, vastly outnumber the followers of Jesus. Shall we adopt one rule of criticism for the investigation of the claims of these different systems? Shall we refuse credence to the record of miraculous events narrated in the Vedas and the Koran, while we give unquestioned assent to every story that comes to us of the marvelous preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures? If absurdities, contradictions and assertions of physical impossibilities characterize the crude conceptions of the primitive races, do we not find an attempt at their reproduction in the angelic appearances, moving stars and midnight dreams that disfigure the portion of truth contained in the early story of the origin of Christianity?

Schleiermacher has well said of the angels: "It cannot be proved that no such beings exist; nevertheless the whole conception is one that could not be born in our time; it belongs exclusively to the primitive idea of the world. Not from one line of reasoning, but from the whole mass of reasoning, comes this immense result: nothing is supernatural." On the same subject, in his preface to "The Life of Jesus," Littré observes: "In

rejecting miracles, the modern age has not acted from deliberate purpose; for it received the tradition of them, with that of its ancestors—always dear and carefully kept—but without wishing to reject them, without trying to do so, and by the single fact of the development with which it was bursting. *An experience which nothing has ever occurred to contradict has taught it that every miraculous story had its origin in vivid imagination, in complaisant credulity, in ignorance of natural laws. With all the research that has been made, no miracle has ever been wrought where it could be observed and proved.*" Even in the glimpses the gospel narratives give us of the alleged working of miracles, Jesus seems to shrink from the forced or unnatural part he was in a manner compelled to act in order to gratify the love of the marvelous characteristic of his age. He repeatedly declines to work miracles. Nay, more, he emphatically condemns the popular demand for miraculous displays. He said on one occasion: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, but no sign shall be given, save that of the prophet Jonas." He repudiated the habit, too often indulged in by teachers of religion even of our own days, of inferring special providences from ordinary accidents; asking his followers if they believed the people upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell were any guiltier than others. He warns those whose mental disorders he corrected by his soothing influence—"casting out devils," as it is in the language of Scripture—to "go their way and see they tell no man"; so little did he court notoriety or reputation arising from thaumaturgy. His true character of a moral reformer appears when he whipped from the porch of

the temple the usurious money-lenders, and when, standing on the hillside, he preached that noble discourse, immortal as humanity, the "Sermon on the Mount." How different is the representation of his chasing devils into swine, stooping down and writing with his finger in the dust when called upon to condemn an erring woman whose frailty he pitied, or on another occasion going through the process—we hate and hesitate to call it jugglery—of mixing clay with his spittle and "anointing" the eyes of a blind man. One of the gospel writers, in a moment of charming frankness, informs us that even to his thaumaturgic powers there were limits, as "Jesus could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief." When the seventy disciples returned to him after preaching the new gospel, filled with the exultant enthusiasm the novelty of their mission inspired, and vaunted, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name," he dashed the cold water of temperate reason upon their hot zeal, saying, "Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not that spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Jesus, like all great reformers, was himself in advance of the conscience as well as the intelligence of his age; but in order to render his mission at all successful he was compelled to deal gently with the superstitions of his time. Probably he was not himself altogether divested of them. Few wholly are. Socrates, whose reason soared above the mythologies of Greece, yet believed that there was an inner voice, a kind of a tutelary divinity within him, ever impelling or restraining him through life. He despised oracular responses; yet he took advantage of that one that declared him to be the wisest

of the Grecians, as it afforded him an opportunity of exposing the pretensions of the poets and philosophers. He showed that they knew nothing with certainty, while he had reached to a higher plane of knowledge in knowing that he knew nothing.

CHAPTER III.

If we accept the theory of Divine Inspiration put forward on behalf of the four gospels that narrate a brief portion of the public and private life of Jesus, we become involved in inextricable difficulty. The discrepancies existing in the account of the miraculous birth of Jesus are inconsistent with any idea of divine inspiration. If these writings were inspired by the Author of truth, they would contain no contradictions; nor would there be any need of the laborious explanations of these contradictions by learned commentators. When God has a message for humanity there will exist no necessity for explanation or modification; nor, it is to be presumed, will it be necessary for him to employ four men to do very imperfectly that which one man could very easily accomplish under divine direction and dictation. If, however, we regard the four gospels as written by men whose feelings were wrought up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, who allowed their credulity to carry them far beyond the limits of sober reality, who accepted easily as true what they desired to believe, and who, without any premeditated intention of deceit, allowed imagination

to wander freely beyond the domain of fact; who wrote in their old age, or in some cases doubtless dictated merely to zealous amanuenses their recollections of the life of Jesus, at a distance of time from the occurrence of the alleged events varying from sixty to a hundred years—many of the difficulties existing in the narratives, irreconcilable on the theory of inspiration, may be adjusted to a certain idea of general harmony and unity.

We are not among those who believe for a moment that Christianity was a scheme and conspiracy concocted by either a few ignorant fishermen or learned rabbis for instituting a new religion; nor do we believe that the four gospels were composed and written to aid and abet any such conspiracy. We agree completely with Paul the apostle that Christianity was not a cunningly devised fable. We believe that it was the natural outcome of the religious development of the age in which it germinated, and is explainable, as such, as any other great moral movement, just as much so as the skepticism of the present day. If this view be the correct one, then the conflicting statements of the gospels, though they may not be made to harmonize, are yet susceptible of explanation. We know that even historical writers will vary very considerably in their treatment of the same subject. Even actual witnesses will, when testifying in courts of justice under the sanctity and obligation of an oath, give different accounts of the transactions that have fallen under their observation. May we not then with reason expect that in the four accounts of the life of Jesus, written long after he passed away, differences should inevitably exist? That they do exist is undeniable. The gospels, as we have them now, were, accord-

ing to the best research that can be had on the subject, not generally in circulation, and even not compiled, within less than a hundred and fifty years after the death of Jesus, though it is highly probable that they existed in a fragmentary and imperfect form within the first century. No one can read the compilations bearing the reputed authorship of Matthew and Mark and not be struck with the conviction that the compiler of the one had before his eyes constantly the work of the other. In several instances the exact language of Matthew is followed by Mark in his description of the same events—totally excluding any hypothesis of undesigned coincidence. Christ in the Scriptures occupies a twofold character, and is viewed in a duplex aspect: one may be denominated the theological view, the other the humanitarian. In the Epistles and in the Gospel of St. John we are presented with the former, in the three gospels we have the latter.

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of the carpenter, the houseless wanderer, the enthusiast who lost his life because of his denunciation of hypocrisy and corruption, the pure moralist whose life was as blameless as his doctrine, the *sans cullote* (republican) who enunciated the leveling doctrine of the equality of all men before God and the brotherhood of the human race; who saw through and exposed the pious frauds of those who loved to stand praying at the street corners; who opposed the arrogant presumptions of ecclesiastical jugglery and priestcraft; whose life was a dream of ecstasy; who, by the shore of the lake, by the river side, in the wilderness or on the mountains, so struggled with the mighty thoughts agitating his fine organism that his enemies charged that he

was possessed of a devil; who fasted long to subdue his physical passions and bring his spiritual nature into closer communion with the silent and mystic influences he thought surrounded him; who saw nothing insignificant in the most ordinary processes of nature; who burst the bands of a vigorous and exclusive Judaism, and gloried not in being either a son of Abraham or of the royal lineage of David, but sought and obtained the noblest distinction of being called emphatically the "Son of Man"; whose life was so obscure, whose exalted character was confounded with that of a mere thaumaturgist; who suffered every indignity possible to conceive, both from a thankless rabble and a bigoted priesthood, and finally was crucified as an impious blasphemer of God and an enemy to the cause of order and good government—this is the Jesus of the gospels, or rather of the first three earlier gospels, depicted before divine honors were claimed for him by others who sought to establish a religious society founded upon his teachings, but who incorporated into the new faith a creed totally foreign to anything Jesus of Nazareth ever taught or dreamed of.

Much difficulty exists in fixing with any degree of certainty the date of the composition of the gospels. The conclusions of the best and unprejudiced scholars are that none of them was written earlier than seventy years after the death of Jesus. Luke was certainly written after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and his son Vespasian. Renan, who labors hard for the authenticity and genuineness of the gospels, says that they were the echo of the reports of the first century after Christ. It is not possible that any further light can be thrown

upon the subject. Beyond the settling of an important historical question, the exact date of their composition is not of prime importance to the world. We know enough to know that sufficient time elapsed between the death of Jesus and their composition to admit of the many additions and narrations of miraculous transactions natural to a condition of civilization that ever associated the supernatural with any great result, moral or physical. No impartial reader of the gospel narrative can fail to be struck with the difference between the real character of Jesus then delineated and the colossal and unreal proportions he is made to assume in the later circular letters of the different apostles to the different churches. Jesus, the man of sorrows, disappears. The friend of Lazarus, Mary and Martha vanishes. Jesus dies. Christ is risen. The Son of Man is lost not only in the Son of God, but Christ is God, the Eternal One, by whose words worlds were framed, and the Savior gives way to the Awful Judge, who shall deal with every man in the hereafter, according to his works. The Christ of the Epistles bearing the names of Peter, James and Paul in hardly a single aspect resembles the Jesus of Matthew, Mark and Luke. No promulgation of the doctrines of the Trinity, Predestination, Justification by Faith, and the redemption of the world through faith in the efficacy of the death of Jesus on the cross, is put forth with any degree of distinctness in the narratives of the men who were living when Jesus entered on his career as a public teacher. No assumption of the dignity of lordship, much less godship, marked his early history and simple life. He discarded even the title of "Master," telling

his disciples to call no man master. A dreamer and visionary, he pushed his ideas of liberty and equality beyond the bounds of reason and the necessities of social life and political government. He condemned extravagance in dress by his beautiful allusion to the lilies, "which toil not, neither do they spin; and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." By the illustration of God's care for the sparrow he inculcated indifference to the future: "Wherefore, take no thought for the morrow, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed; for after all these things do the Gentiles seek." As the result of this communistic teaching we find his followers, for a short period after his death, endeavoring to establish churches on the communistic plan. But, as every such effort is antagonistic to the progress of civilization, as well as the best interests of society, the attempt proved a failure. It may be stated as a fact that the religion Jesus taught, if he ever taught a religion in the strict sense of the word, which we doubt, differed materially from the Christology of his disciples and apostles, and could hardly be recognized in subsequent Christianity—invested with imperial power, having an organized hierarchy, magnificent temples and imposing ceremonies. The real Jesus of Nazareth lived and suffered and died much in the same manner as many other reformers before and since his time. The ideal Christ, as the ages grew darker, and as time in its flight carried the world further away from the true story of the carpenter's son, assumed magnificent proportions; his faith overshadowed man's intellect and gave form and color to European

civilization for eighteen hundred years, and, reaching the sublime heights of devotion, buried out of sight the mild Nazarene, placing upon the pedestal he ought to have occupied the colossal figure of an incarnate god!

CHAPTER IV.

Ernest Renan, in his "Critical History of Jesus," says: "They say that Angelico of Fiesole never painted the heads of the Virgin or of Christ except on his knees; it would be well for criticism to imitate his example, and after having adored them to face the radiance of certain figures before which the ages have bent low." He further adds: "The first duty of the philosopher is to swell the chorus of humanity in worship of moral goodness and beauty, exhibited in all noble characters and elevated symbols." If a painter will paint a better picture of the head of the Virgin, or any other head, by going upon his knees, the world, only concerned in the production of a good picture, will offer no special objection to the assumption of that or any other posture the painter may desire to assume. The picture, and not the posture, is all it cares for. When, however, it becomes the duty of criticism to discuss any historical question of importance, no worse attitude than the one Renan alludes to can be possibly assumed. When we have "adored" any figure without investigating its claims to adoration, we render ourselves utterly incapable of independent criti-

cism. Nor is it the duty of the philosopher to "swell any chorus of humanity" until he first ascertains whether the song and the chorus are founded on eternal verities.

Because we have too many "adored figures" and "swelled choruses," because from the first dawn of the light of our intellectual faculties have we been too much given up to the blind worship of human characters or theological abstractions, do we, in after life, when reason demands the grounds of belief, find the independence of our judgment unsettled and the clearness of our vision obstructed by the mists of superstition that have clouded the morning of life. Educated as we are, one-third of our life is spent in acquiring ideas and impressions that the investigation of the succeeding third demonstrates the falsity of, while oftentimes the remaining portion of our days is passed in indifference as to the truth or error of any creed or dogma not affecting our immediate and personal interests.

We should doubtless deal gently with the failings or excesses of the great men who have conferred benefit upon the race; but we neither exalt them nor advance the cause of truth by lifting them above the laws of human existence.

We want to know Alexander as the son of Philip of Macedon, not of Jupiter Ammon. Socrates has our sympathy, not because by one brave deed he drank hemlock in obedience to law, but because he endured with more than heroic fortitude the incompatibility of Xantippe. Of the inner lives of the great men of even comparatively modern times we know little. Who knows anything worthy of record of the private life of Shakspeare? The authorship of even the plays that bear his

name is still a matter of doubt. The acquisition of knowledge is the object of all inquiry. Historical research is attractive, because we desire to know what has preceded our own appearance upon the stage of human existence. This desire it is that lifts man above the brutes that perish. Knowledge enables him to generalize, and to form some intelligent comprehension of his relation not only to the phenomena of the present, but to the vanished specter of the past, and, in some sort, permits him to cast the horoscope of the future. It is evident that, to whatever extent he allows feelings of reverence, adoration or early impressions to influence him, to the same extent will his conceptions of the men and social or political movements of antiquity deviate from the standard of rigid truth. Sallust justly remarks that the exploits of the Greeks were sufficiently great and glorious, but were not quite so magnificent as fame had reported them, and assigns as a reason that Greece had produced writers of great ability. One of the chief impediments to historical research arises from the struggle constantly, though silently, waged between the deductions of reason and the influence of early impressions, or, as Renan puts it, from painting pictures on our knees. Almost every child born in a Christian land has been, to some extent, when the receptive faculties were plastic, brought under the influence of religious instruction and training. The reasoning powers were never called, at this stage, into exercise. The child is told that God lives in heaven, wherever that may be, and that he made the world. He is thus left to form the childish idea of a personal God. Even before he was capable of any intricate combination of ideas, he was further informed that

Jesus Christ was both God and the Son of God as well as the Son of Man. That this is a rational system of education few unprejudiced minds will admit. It leads naturally to infidelity. When reason asserts its independence, the man will repudiate the impositions that have been practiced upon him when his faith in every statement made to him by those whose authority he reverenced was unquestioned. Failing to see the harmony between the God of his childhood, who loved his creatures and yet permitted the majority of them to be captured by the Devil; unable to recognize any consistency in the assertion that God is omnipotent, and yet suffers an inferior creature called Satan to mar his work and drag down into endless perdition and unutterable torture millions of God's creatures for whom God's son died—nothing remains henceforth for the enfranchised intelligence but atheism or utter indifference to all so-called religious teaching. The nursing mother, the Church, then takes hold of him. She does not seek to undo the wrong she has inflicted upon his outraged intelligence, but she kindly, with bell, book and candle, excommunicates him from the body of the faithful. Though he is just what she made him, he is called heretic, infidel and atheist. He is dangerous to society, and it were an act of kindness to destroy him, lest his leprosy infect sound members. Then the spirit of inquiry was extinguished by the loathsome dungeon; he was stretched upon the rack, his bones were pulled out of joint; the nails were torn from his flesh; his poor eyes, that loved to look upon the sun and the sweet face of nature—in default of God—he adored, were rendered sightless by red-hot irons; his tongue was torn out by the roots; his feet

were crushed in iron boots; and he was at last mercifully roasted alive over a slow fire; while faithful Christians stood by and applauded the infliction of the most refined and excruciating tortures upon a human creature that the devils in hell, if any there be, would have hung their heads in shame at witnessing. Yet this ineffable infamy arose, in a great measure, from the pernicious habit of painting on one's knees. Hence it is difficult, in view of the monstrous atrocities perpetrated in the name of religion, to paint upon one's knees even the innocent character of him under the "sanction" of whose great name such indelible infamies have been inflicted upon humanity. Hence it is, too, that if, in examining too closely "the figures of antiquity," the varnish be rubbed a little off of them, the fault is not with the honest critic, but with the perpetrators of pious frauds, who, in order to add color to these impositions, have smeared over the true figures with incrustations of myths and falsehoods. Jesus of Nazareth never claimed for himself an origin different from the common heritage of humanity. It is reasonable to assume that never, even in moments of most exalted inspiration, did he dream of such a vast and overshadowing system of religion that, in the process of the ages, assumed from an origin so humble and obscure such magnificent proportions. How the poor Galilean, who, to use his own graphic expression, "had not where to lay his head," would have been dazzled and appalled had some hand thrust aside the veil that hid the future from his view and revealed to his bewildered intelligence the grandeur, both in its extent and cruelty, of the ecclesiastical organization which in after ages elevated him not only above the gods of antiquity,

but assigned him a position equal and identical with that of the Creator of the infinite and eternal Universe! If, as he passed through the wheaten fields of Palestine on that Sabbath morning, and, invited by no man, plucked the ears to satisfy his hunger, he could have foreseen the countless millions in the future bowing down at the mention of his name; could his vision have rested upon the magnificent temples to be erected in his honor, altars laden with gold and precious stones, and a priesthood serving at more than ten thousand altars, engaged in a new worship, surpassing in magnificence that of his own nation while Solomon's temple stood—what a vista of glory indescribable he would have revealed to the motley company of ragged and hungry disciples who followed him! Or how bitter would have seemed the mockery of the fantastic panorama to him as he sat down, tired with a weary journey, by the well of Jacob, and asked a Samaritan courtesan for a drink of cold water!

The moral and spiritual utterances of Christ, such as have come down to us, if collected in connected form, instead of being scattered with variations and additions through the gospels, would hardly occupy as much space as the column of one of our daily newspapers. Yet upon the fragments of these detached utterances the whole system of Christian theology, embodied in the Epistles and incorporated into creeds and dogmas, is based. Conceding the Sermon on the Mount to be most admirable both in its structure and the humanizing spirit it breathes, yet it must be admitted that the noble truths embodied in this matchless discourse were given to the world long before their delivery in Judea. The "Golden Rule"

was taught, we know, by Confucius in distinct and unmistakable language. Socrates, Aristippus, Aristotle, Sextus, Marcus Aurelius and others taught it and lived it as nearly as mortals can. Buckle, in his "History of Civilization," truly remarks: "The system of morals propounded in the New Testament contained no maxim that had not been previously enunciated; and that some of the most beautiful passages in the apostles' writings are quotations from pagan authors is well known to every scholar; and so far from supplying, as some suppose, an objection against Christianity, it is a strong recommendation of it, as indicating the intimate relation between the doctrines of Christ and the moral sympathies of mankind in different ages. But to assert that Christianity communicated to man moral truths previously unknown argues on the part of the asserter either gross ignorance or willful fraud." For evidence of the knowledge of moral truths possessed by barbarous nations, independently of Christianity, compare Mackay's "Religious Development," Muir's "History of Greek Literature," the works of Sir William Jones, and Mills' "History of India." The development of the Messianic idea rendered the disciples of Jesus favorable to his teaching and that of John the Baptist. The Jewish nation, owing to its sad and bitter experience of two captivities, national humiliation as well as individual oppression, had, at the time of the birth of Jesus, almost lost faith in the expectation of the advent of the son of David in the character of a great warrior who should restore the kingdom of Israel in all its pristine glory. That such expectations were indulged in is apparent from the question put to Jesus, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

These expectations reached their burlesque climax on the occasion of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding upon an ass, while his followers cut down palm branches and threw them, and even the clothing they wore, in the way, in order that the procession might assume an appearance of a triumphal entry. The assumption of a ragged royalty was destitute of any political significance, though it may have furnished the materials of a plausible accusation against Jesus by his enemies the priests, who were ever on the alert to bring home to him some violations of the laws that would bring him under the ban of the Roman power. Even long anterior to the birth of Jesus the Messianic idea had lost its vitality and changed its form with the waning fortunes of the Jewish race. Isaiah had more than once alluded to the future hero, crushed with the burden of national humiliation—"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"—and who, embodying the miseries of a broken and divided nation as well as a conquered people, was led as a sheep to the slaughter.

It does seem that Jesus, when the supreme hour of his career approached, was tempted for a moment into a measure of armed resistance to the constituted authorities. When he saw the lines of the hunters closing around him, he told his disciples to procure weapons of defense; telling him that had no sword to sell his coat and buy one. His few followers did arm themselves after a fashion, and one of his disciples, whose zeal ever outran discretion, cut off the ear of one Malchus, a servant of the priest. This seems to have been the only casualty attending the capture of Jesus. Yet one can plainly see that even this show of resistance was wholly

foreign to the disposition of him who said, "If thine enemy smite thee on the right cheek, turn unto him the left also." Jesus promptly rebuked Peter, adding, "The cup which my father hath given me, shall I not drink?" Doubtless his fine nature, full of sympathy for the whole human race, needed only this single exhibition of unseemly and undignified resistance to regain its native sweetness and composure, and to meet the inevitable with the serenity of a moralist and the fortitude of a martyr. From the whole tenor of his life and character one cannot fail to perceive that Jesus never seriously entertained any intention of enacting the part of either a warrior or statesman, by whose efforts the independence of the Jewish race was to be restored. Nor did he seek by the employment of force the propagation of his views. On the contrary, he denounced its employment in the most emphatic language: "All they that take up the sword shall perish by the sword." He was not even a patriot, though belonging to one of the most exclusive races on earth. He seems to have lacked not only the sentiment of patriotism, which among the Greeks and the Romans was stronger than the religious sentiment, but he appears to have ignored the ties of blood and kindred, considering them as accidents of birth of little or no consequence. God was his father, and every man—Jew and Gentile, rich or poor (and especially the poor man), saint or sinner, the maniac, supposed by a barbarous people to be possessed of a devil, and the outcast leper—was his brother. Patriotism, family affections and the ties of blood all seem to have sunk out of sight in the soundless sea of his yearning love for humanity. If ever a man realized in all its holy and lofty

significance the idea of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, it was truly Jesus of Nazareth. When it was told him, on one occasion, while engaged in his service to humanity, that his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to see him, he turned upon his interrupter with almost savage abruptness, and in sharp rebuke exclaimed, "Who is my mother and who are my brethren? Whosoever doeth the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my mother and brother and sister." To his far-reaching sympathy his natural brother was but a human being, and every human being was to him both mother, brother and sister.

Certainly one entertaining the cosmopolitan sympathies of Jesus would least of all be qualified to act the part of a Messiah such as the Jews, a most unsociable and exclusive race, at one period of their history entertained definite conceptions of. He emphatically declared, when charged with treason, that his kingdom was not of this world. When Pilate, as John's gospel relates, asked him if he were king of the Jews, he repelled the assumption of any regal claims, as though there was something absurd in such an accusation, sarcastically replying, "Thou sayest that I am a king!" He added, leaving no doubt as to the nature of his mission, "To this end came I into the world, and for this cause was I born: that I might bear witness unto the truth." In the judgment-hall of Pilate, when death in its most shameful aspect and dreadful form awaited him; in the supreme hour when the sands of life were fast sinking in the glass of time, when the substance and the shadow became alike indistinct, when the past and the present seemed but a vanishing dream—he claimed no divine or supernatural

origin, no sovereignty or dominion over the eternal and changeless laws of nature; he did not even claim that he had given to the world a new revelation; he only asserted that he was born into the world that he might add to the list of the deathless names who "have borne witness to the truth."

The great cardinal doctrines of Christianity are: the salvation of the world through the blood or death of Christ, justification by faith, and the divinity of Jesus. There are, of course, many minor doctrines dependent on these as corollaries from great propositions. The doctrine of atonement is not a novel one. Appeasing and propitiating gods and demons by sacrificial offerings and gifts is older than any existing form of religion among mankind. It has, in one form or another, formed a distinctive feature of the religious worship of every race on the face of the earth that ever entertained religious conceptions. It has incorporated itself with religious service equally in Judea and in Mexico. Sacrificial offerings have been tendered to heaven with bloody rites by a savage priesthood in the dark recesses of the gloomy forests of Gaul and Britain and amid the arid wastes of Africa. The smoke of the burnt carcasses of animals offered to appease offended deities has tainted the pure air of heaven ascending from the lands watered by the Ganges, the Nile, the Mississippi, the Thames, the Orinoco and the Danube. The religion of the Jews, though monotheistic ostensibly, had, at almost the birth of the nation, become infected with the worst practices of pagan idolatry. Thus we find Moses commanding the people that they should "make no cutting in the flesh," nor mutilate themselves for the dead, nor suffer their children

to pass through the fire to Moloch. The story of the Jewish Jeptha's vow, by which he bound himself to sacrifice his own daughter, finds a parallel in that of Iphigenia, in Aulis.

Sacrificial worship is the outgrowth of a barbarous condition of society. The unreasoning savage regarded tempests, floods, earthquakes, pestilences, the presence of wild beasts and noxious reptiles as visitations of divine anger. His savage experience, limited as it was, taught him that enemies are to be appeased with gifts. What reasoning more natural than that he should propitiate the anger of inimical gods in a similar manner? Noah, when he escaped destruction from a flood that devastated the country where he dwelt, could not give the god, that preserved him, food and choice gifts actually; but he could reach him with the savor of burnt-offerings that ascended to heaven and entered, as we are told with unaffected plainness, the nostrils of Jehovah, immediately after the flood. Jehovah was more than satisfied; he even repented of the evil he had wrought, and graciously promised that he would no more curse the ground for man's sake, nor smite any living thing as he had done; and that, while earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease. (Gen. viii, 20, *et seq.*) Cæsar found Gaul and Britain, fifty-six years before the time of Christ, sustaining the Druidical worship, which was one of the most sanguinary and cruel that ever prevailed in Europe. Human sacrifices were repeatedly offered up by hundreds on stone altars, the victims being usually furnished from the captives taken in battle. Samuel, the inspired prophet of Israel, hewed King Agag in

pieces before the Lord. Elijah, another inspired prophet of the first rank and class, reddened the waters of the brook Kishon with the blood of four hundred and fifty of the prophets and priests of Baal, who failed to make fire from heaven lick up the water surrounding the altar of burnt sacrifices, when the worshipers of both gods, Jehovah and Baal, had agreed to make this a test case. (I Kings, xviii.) The antiquity and universality, almost, of sacrificial offerings are too well established to need any discussion. To trace the history of sacrificial offerings would be to write that of every religious system. In the Jewish religion the sacrificial idea had obtained its highest development—so much so that it had passed into a religious axiom that "without shedding of blood there was no remission of sin." The author of the book of Genesis seems to have been well acquainted with this doctrine. He represents Jehovah accepting the bloody sacrifices of Abel, while he spurned the bloodless fruits of the earth offered by Cain. By the most ingenious species of sophistry, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews attempts to show that "by faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts."

Judged by the light of reason, by sentiment and all the purest instincts of our nature, one would imagine that did the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe need offerings from human hands, he would derive more pleasure from the spectacle of altars decked with flowers and fruits, and the beautiful trophies of man's toil and industry, than from those besmeared with the lifeblood of inoffensive animals, butchered for his glory. But blood-

shedding is a savage instinct, and man has, in all ages, "made God in his own image and likeness." The book of Leviticus is well worth perusal, if alone for the purpose of showing how completely the idea of sacrificial atonement had entered, not only into the celebration of the Jewish worship, but had penetrated every circumstance and condition of individual life. But in the slow process of the development of the intelligence, the efficacy of sacrificial offerings began to be questioned. Were it not so, the Hebrew poet, with a spirit of spiritual independence far in advance of his age, could not have said, "Shall I indeed eat bulls' flesh and drink the blood of goats? Are not all the beasts of the forests mine, and the cattle upon ten thousand hills?" But in no portion of the Jewish Scriptures do we find anything to support the idea that sacrificial offerings were employed for the purpose of escaping punishment in a future state of existence, due to sins committed in this life. Nor do we find anything to sustain this view in the whole range of ancient literature, previous to the propagation of Christianity, whether denominated sacred or profane. The Jews, as well as other nations and races, entertained no definite conceptions of life after death. No traces of the immortality of the soul exist in the Old Testament writings, and as for the resurrection of the body, the very idea of such a physical absurdity entered no man's conceptions. They had recourse to sacrificial offerings to propitiate the anger of the gods, and to secure their favor in the actual transactions of life. Jehovah never promised his worshipers happiness beyond the grave. The usual injunction was, "This do that thou shalt live." "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may

be long in the land the Lord thy God giveth thee." Temporal prosperity and long life were promised to the observers of the divine law. Never, in any instance that we know of, was there any reference to the joys of heaven or the tortures of hell.

Jesus never preached the doctrine, now so common, of the salvation of the world through his blood, shed in a sacrificial sense. This doctrine was painfully and ingeniously elaborated by his followers, who took little from him except his name to add weight to the system they, after his death, established. Jesus says (John xvii, 4): "I have glorified thee on earth. *I have finished* the work which thou gavest me to do." This expression would be utterly unintelligible did Christ believe that the world was to be saved through the shedding of his blood. His blood was not yet shed, and therefore the great work of the salvation of the human soul was yet unfinished. If the "salvation" of the world has been in any sense affected by Jesus, it has been by his life, not by the cruel and shameful form of death inflicted upon him by a bigoted rabble and an indifferent Roman governor of a conquered province. Yet the world goes on stupidly ignoring the noble life of Jesus, shocking every enlightened conscience by insisting that the shedding of a few drops of the physical fluid called blood that fell upon the dust of Palestine two thousand years ago, when a brutal Roman soldier touched with his spear the side of the expiring Jesus of Nazareth, has redeemed mankind, appeased the anger of an offended God, and unbarred the crystal gates of heaven to the whole human race, that otherwise would have rushed forever into the gaping jaws of the insatiate pit and the lake of brimstone.

Measured by the Jewish conception of sacrificial offering, the death of Jesus, granting for a moment that the God of the Universe would accept the blood of a man or a god as an atonement for moral guilt, lacks all the essential attributes of a sacrifice. The death of a human or divine being by crucifixion could be reckoned in no sense a sacrifice. There was the victim, it is true, but priest and fire and altar were wanting. The only priest who could have officiated on an occasion so tragic and so pregnant with the eternal destinies of mankind would have been the Omnipotent God himself. He alone, to preserve the harmony of the sacrificial conception, must have stood beside the altar and plunged the knife into the quivering heart of the victim. Nay, more: if the claim of the New-Testament theology be true, God himself was the victim, and committed self-immolation to appease himself! Do all the contradictions of all the religious conceptions ever evolved by the human race, savage or civilized, contain an absurdity at once so revolting and offensive to conscience and intelligence as this? The sacrifice of God for the salvation of man! Yet the sacrifice was a deception, and the death a pretense, as in a few hours after the occurrence the sacrificial offering was alive and apparently in good health, showing to his incredulous disciples the marks of the wounds in his side and the imprint in his feet and hands of the nails that held him to the cross. Did the Creator of the world, of the eternal and indestructible stars revolving in the silent spaces of infinity, the Source of all life, whose influence permeates all matter and spirit, expire on a cross, two thousand years ago, between two miserable culprits, surrounded by a company of Roman

soldiery, a mob of jeering Jews, and a few sympathetic women? This is not a harsh and strained presentation of the question. If Christian theology be true, this is exactly what did occur. If Christ was not God, Christian theology, as it is commonly received, is a fabrication, and, no matter how excellent its moral teaching, its claims to anything more than a mere human institution, the product of natural causes and the subject of natural conditions, must be forever abandoned. It is no explanation of the contradiction to assert that Jesus was, at the same time, perfect man and perfect god. The existence, the life and death of such a being on earth, is beyond the realm of possibilities, and wholly outside the domain of reason. No amount of "testimony" can make the impossible possible and the incredible credible. We have no testimony, we can have no testimony, that Jesus was God. He did not come down from heaven bodily. He was apparently born into the world like any other perfectly human creature. He did not tower far away above the men of his own time, or those that preceded and succeeded him, in intellectual endowments or educational acquirements. He has given to the world no elaborate work, such as the poems of Homer, the oratory of Demosthenes, the historical writings of Thucydides, or the philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle. His sermons, parables and dialogues, unquestionably excellent as they are, and breathing moral purity and tender love for humanity, are yet such as could have been delivered by a human being whose soul was filled with noble views for the amelioration of his kind, and whose heart was in sympathy with the progress of humanity. He never himself claimed to be God. He did

claim to be the son of God; though this is a very expansive expression, and admits of great latitude of interpretation. Christians call themselves, even nowadays, the children of God; and if they can do so with propriety, why should not Jesus have assumed and have accorded to him the distinguishing title of the "son of God"? Granting, for the sake of the argument, that while on earth he worked the few miracles whose performance is ascribed to him, this would not be even presumptive evidence that Jesus was God. The Hebrew Scriptures abound with the recitals of the working of miracles, including the raising of the dead, by prophets of even indifferent reputation for piety. The magicians of Egypt worked some very extraordinary miracles, if we accept the truth of the Bible narrative. Saul and a banished witch brought the old prophet Samuel out of his grave. Even Balaam's ass exhibited miraculous power of a rare character. Among the Jews the working of what are called miracles attracted little attention. If the reputed godship of Jesus were to be based upon the miracles he performed, how many would be entitled to dispute his claims? It is evident that Jesus attached little importance to miracle-working, and never thought of claiming to be God on account of any wonders he performed.

CHAPTER V.

Christian theologians, in explaining the doctrine of the atonement, assert, with complacent self-assurance, that in the crucifixion of Jesus the attributes of God's mercy and justice were reconciled and harmonized. God being just, they argue, must necessarily have sent every sinner to hell or a place of eternal torture, presided over by the Devil in person, in consequence of the sin the race originally contracted on account of Adam's disobedience, and for actual individual depravity and unbelief. But as God is perfectly just, so is he infinitely compassionate. He does not wish the punishment of a single sinner, and he would doubtless pardon the sin of the whole human race, and render man happy on earth, and continue that happiness in the future world, were it not for that dreadful principle of justice that emanates from him, embodied in the expression, "The soul that sinneth shall surely die." God is represented, as it were, in a dilemma. Justice must be satisfied, and yet mercy, too, claims consideration. The divine wisdom at last triumphs. The problem is solved. God determines that God shall be born into the world, of a woman. The

being born is not God exactly, but is the son of God. He has a divine and a human nature. He is born a helpless babe. "He increases in stature and wisdom and in favor with God and man," not as though he was already God the Omnipotent—and who as such could not increase in wisdom or in favor with God—but like any ordinary youth of excellent natural disposition. After a life of complete silence and obscurity he began to be about "thirty years of age, being as was supposed the son of Joseph"; he commenced his public ministry, and, having spent three short years in the work of gaining a few followers, delivering a few discourses, and healing a few sick folks and cripples, he is crucified by order of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, on a mixed accusation—presented in an illegal and informal manner—of sedition and blasphemy. God in heaven foreordains all these movements. It is the completion of a plan mapped out before ever the worlds were framed. God visits upon the person of Jesus, the man, who is also the equal of God, and God, the punishment for sin that the wicked human race ought to suffer. Jesus the man dies, but only for a short time; he descends into hell—though how long he remained in pandemonium we are not informed—and ascends into heaven to assume his pristine glory and power. God's justice is satisfied and mercy triumphs. This is the exact story of Jesus and the atonement as told in the Scriptures. Many "Lives of Christ" have been written and will be written; but this is the substance of the oft-told story. Taking all these assumptions for verities, a child in reasoning powers might ask, Where was the divine justice in punishing the innocent for the guilty? If a man committed a capital offense

and his life became by judicial process forfeited to the State, would the Executive "reconcile justice and mercy" by accepting the substitution of an innocent man, who had never violated the law, for the criminal whose life was declared forfeited? Would there be even mercy in such a compromise? What human ruler would dare to perpetrate such an outrage? Yet the wisdom of the Omniscient could devise no better plan for the salvation of the world and for securing the happiness of his creatures. We will doubtless be met with the assertion that our ideas of justice are not in any respect similar to those of God. We are thankful that they are not in accord with those ascribed to the Jehovah of the Jewish Scriptures. What ideas of justice and mercy can we entertain than such as those that arise from the experience of life? It is useless to talk to us at all about God's justice or any of his attributes, except they conform to our own ideas. This appeal to our reason on some subjects, and the denial of its use on other subjects, is childish trifling unworthy of reasonable creatures. To ask us to accept any statement or theory as being in accordance with divine justice, and in the same breath to tell us that we can entertain no accurate views of any of the attributes of the Deity, is an insult to our understanding that every man who is bold enough to think for himself will quickly resent. The Protestant churches graciously allow men to think for themselves within prescribed limits; but when the spirit of inquiry transcends the narrow limits of creeds and articles of faith, and seeks to descend below the surface and examine the basis on which the superstructure of Christianity rests, then the churches, too late, put up a signboard warning off, under pains and

penalties, all trespassers. Far more consistent is the Catholic Church in denying to her members the right of questioning or discussing in any manner the cardinal doctrines of faith. She assumes to be the sole depository of divine truth and the interpreter of the divine will as revealed in the Scriptures. To her rigid adherence to this policy she owes the maintenance of her colossal power, and will continue to maintain it until the mighty sweep of thought and the revolutionary wave of universal intelligence shall carry away forever all barriers that stand in the way of the thorough investigation of the great problems to the solution of which the aggregate intellectual power of man is pledged. To the apostle Paul, chiefly, the world may attribute the errors and evils consequent upon the preaching and acceptance of what is called the doctrine of the atonement. This doctrine, taught with the sanction, presumably, of the highest Authority in the Universe, for two thousand years, has contributed, more than all other errors incorporated into religious systems, to debase the universal conscience and confound all just ideas of right and wrong. The doctrine of vicarious punishment endured, or the application of vicarious virtues conferred, is the incarnation of injustice. It destroys the obligation of individual responsibility. The common-sense of mankind has repudiated it in all the relations of the individual to society or society to the individual. It teaches no noble lesson of self-denial; it inculcates no principle of virtue; for manly fortitude and endurance it substitutes abject dependence on the supposed virtue and work of another, and renders the man who sincerely believes it the abject slave of priestcraft and superstition.

If a life after the disintegration of the elements that constitute our physical existence awaits mankind, is it not more consonant with the deductions of reason and analogy to presume that the individual attains a higher plane of existence or sinks into a lower scale—if there can be any retrogression—in exact proportion as he cultivates or neglects the culture of the moral and intellectual faculties for which this earth constitutes so diversified a theater of exhibition, than to suppose that he secures eternal happiness by faith in the efficacy of "the blood of Jesus" (meaning the death of an individual crucified two thousand years ago), or that he is doomed to an eternity of inexpressible torture, without respite or relief, simply because he cannot accept as a truth the statement that God died for his sins?

CHAPTER VI.

The acceptance of this doctrine of the atonement is only less pernicious to individual responsibility than the ignoble one, derived from the same source, of the total depravity of mankind. The preachers of modern Christianity oftentimes seem to take pleasure in drawing disgusting pictures of our fallen state and lost and ruined condition. They delight in telling us that "our righteousness is as filthy rags"; that from "the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness in us, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores"; and quote largely from the Hebrew Scriptures such and similar elegant and flattering descriptions of human nature. This as a course of instruction is a grave error, as well as the inculcation of a pernicious fiction. One of the most effectual ways of rendering a man utterly reckless is to attempt to persuade him that he is totally depraved and incapable of any moral improvement. When this has been unhappily accomplished, self-respect, a decent regard for the opinions of others, and other barriers that protect society from the incursions of ignorance and unbridled passions, are forever swept away. Nothing

henceforth remains for the individual but the restraints imposed by the law, and social ostracism. That human nature is totally depraved hardly needs denial. No one believes it; even those who preach it, in practice give it flat contradiction. In every civilized state provision is made for the support of the aged, the sick, infirm and insane who are unable to provide for their own wants. There are free schools from which are disseminated all the blessings of education. Institutions of learning are liberally endowed by private individuals all over the land; and men have bestowed upon them the accumulations of a lifetime, not to derive from them any benefit themselves, but to aid in diminishing the sum of human suffering and ameliorate the condition of the race.

It is about time that the world had heard the last of this debasing doctrine of total depravity that has wrought such infinite mischief in blunting the human conscience and inculcating degrading ideas of the status and dignity of man. Associated with the soulless doctrines of the depravity of human nature and the atonement is what is called "justification by faith." It means, if we rightly understand it, that by believing *in* Jesus, as it is called, we are enabled to apply the benefits resulting from his death to ourselves individually; that Jesus has suffered in our stead all the punishment that God would otherwise have inflicted upon every human being; his righteousness and sinlessness is imputed to us as though it were our own; but that our believing this is made a condition precedent to our receiving the benefit of Christ's work. In the death of Jesus the requirements of God's justice were completely satisfied, and, in the language of Scripture, "by his stripes we are healed."

It is further necessary, before we can claim any benefit from the death of Jesus, that we believe, no matter how much opposed to our reason, that Jesus was, in the sense in which it is commonly received, the son of God; that he arose on the third day from his death to another life; and that now, at the right hand of God, he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Now, what is believing? Paul, the great originator of this doctrine, defines faith to be "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." His admirers are fond of quoting this as a most accurate and lucid definition. But when analyzed it is only a meaningless though euphonious contradiction. There is no substance of things hoped for but actual fruition. "The evidence of things not seen" is a contradiction on its face, and might only mean circumstantial evidence at best. "Faith," as applied to an individual, ordinarily means the trust reposed in his character, or in the veracity of his statements; and is based, usually, upon our knowledge of the individual, his reputation, and also upon the further consideration that his statements, though for the moment incapable of verification, correspond with what is not improbable, and do not contradict our own experience or that of others. In this sense and meaning of the expression it is evident that we can have no more "faith" in Jesus or Paul than in Socrates or Julius Cæsar. Of the life of Cæsar we know absolutely more than that of Jesus; yet no one talks of having faith in Cæsar. The employment of this expression, applied to one who has long since passed off the stage of terrestrial existence, is absolutely devoid of intelligible comprehension.

Nowhere, that we are aware of, has Jesus of Naza-

reth proclaimed the doctrine of justification through faith. He did preach morality, charity, the brotherhood of man; contempt for rites and ceremonies, as constituting no part of spiritual worship. Though a Jew by birth, his far-reaching sympathies extended beyond the narrow confines of his race amd country. He knew no race and no country. He whose clear vision penetrated the shams and hypocrisies of the priests and the Pharisees would have been the last in the world to have taught a doctrine by which the crimes and impurities of life may be atoned for by the expression of the formula of belief. How does "faith in Christ" affect any fact in the life of Jesus? If Jesus were even the son of God in the supernatural sense in which it is claimed he was, faith has nothing whatever to do with it. He either was or was not, and what we may believe or not believe on the subject affects nothing. If Jesus died to save mankind, faith has nothing to do with his death. It is a circumstance unaffected by faith as little as the appearance of the aurora borealis is. If Jesus, having actually died, actually rose again from the dead—which is contrary to all human experience, and an occurrence unlike any which ever happened in the history of the world, at all authenticated—faith does not render the impossible possible. No views that we may entertain, and no feelings of ours, can modify in the slightest the character of an event supposed to have occurred two thousand years ago. The truth seems to be that "faith in Christ" is but another name for a condition of mental exaltation that people work themselves, or permit themselves to be worked, into. It is founded on no reasoning process, and is wholly outside the realm of logical deduction. When

believers have reached this happy condition in which the voice of reason is stifled, they ascribe the blessed result to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Faith itself is not an independent act of the will. It is "the gift of God," that may fall upon the most obdurate unbeliever as well as upon the most willing recipient of Divine favor. Now, it must be admitted that since faith is by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, the individual who believes can claim no credit for an act not his, and ought to be entitled to no benefit for what is accomplished independent of even his will. It is true that we are told that we may resist the Spirit, and in the Scriptures are even commanded not to do so; but a moment's reflection will convince any man that resistance to the Almighty is a sheer impossibility, and that even to suggest anything of the kind seems very like what is considered irreverence by many. It equally follows that, since faith is not an act of the individual which he can exercise at will, and its possession is wholly beyond his control, it would not be in harmony with God's attribute of justice to doom a human being to eternal torture and damnation because he happened to miss the gift of faith. Paul says, "Whom he will have mercy upon, he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth." This certainly is a harsh and inhuman representation of the character of the Christians' God; but if it be the truth, we must only bear it as best we can.

We are frequently invited to "come to Jesus," though in what manner we are to reach Jesus is not set forth with sufficient perspicuity. We are told to "look to Jesus," to lay "hold on Jesus," and many other expressions are being constantly used that are wholly destitute

of practical application. Instead of furnishing those seeking reasonable arguments with some rational defense of Christianity, and throwing what historical light there remains upon the most momentous question that ever in the life of God or man riveted the attention of intelligent beings, and in comparison with which all others pale into utter insignificance, they are treated to commonplace repetitions and wearisome platitudes, often accompanied with bitter denunciations; so that they are forced to turn away from all inquiries into the origin of religious ideas and seek diversion in the active pursuits and pleasures of life, or, if animated by a restlessness that will not be appeased, they sink at last into a despondency deeper than

> "The Sirbonian bog
> Between Damiata and Mount Cassius old,
> Where armies whole have sunk."

CHAPTER VII.

Believing the story of the resurrection of Jesus, in a physical sense, to be purely mythical; holding that the assumed truth of the statement would involve a contradiction of the universally accepted laws of nature—it is useless to attempt any reconciliation of the Gospel narratives with actual fact upon any reasonable hypothesis. It may, however, be remarked that the Gospel accounts of the reputed resurrection of Jesus not only fail to harmonize, but differ very essentially.

It is doubtless a humiliating task, in this boasted age of enlightenment, to be compelled to devote any attention to the consideration of a subject that presents no reasonable phase of discussion; yet as many persons of intelligence accept in good faith the story of the resurrection, relying on the alleged truth of the Gospel narratives, it may be as well to meet them upon their own ground, descend to their line of argument, and oppose them with weapons drawn from their own armory. Matthew tells us that after the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea begged the body of Jesus from Pilate; that he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, laid it in a new tomb

hewn out of the rock and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher; that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" were sitting over against the sepulcher; that on the next day, the Pharisees, reminding Pilate of Jesus' prediction of his resurrection, and fearing lest his disciples should steal him away by night, obtained permission to seal up the sepulcher and set a watch; that in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn, toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" came to see the sepulcher; that there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it; his countenance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow; that for fear of this angelic apparition the keepers did shake and become as dead men. We are next abruptly informed, without the slightest reference to any previous conversation (Matt. xxviii, 5), "And *the angel answered and said* unto the women, Fear not, for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said." Here the angel seems to be well acquainted with the sayings of Jesus; but it looks to us more like the language of Matthew than of the angel. "Come and see where the Lord lay, and go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo! I have told you." The remaining portion of Matthew's narrative informs us that the women immediately met Jesus, who revealed himself to them and to his disciples; that the soldiers were bribed by the chief priests to say that the body of Jesus was stolen by his disciples, and that such a report was current "until this day," meaning, of course, a time long

subsequent to the death of Jesus, when this gospel was written. With regard to the statement of the chief priest that the soldiers were bribed to put out a report that the body of Jesus was stolen, we reply that such a measure would argue supreme folly on the part of the chief priest. If the resurrection of Jesus was a matter of common notoriety, and he was "seen of many" after his resurrection, the stealing of his body would offer no satisfactory solution of his living appearance.

To sum up, Matthew's account of the resurrection is based upon the alleged appearance of an angel to two women, whose minds must have been disordered by midnight vigils at the grave of Jesus and intense excitement consequent upon his crucifixion, the conversation with the angel, his inviting them to see where the Lord lay, and the appearance of Jesus himself to the women and the disciples. Matthew further adds that Jesus showed himself to his eleven disciples on a mountain; that they worshiped him, but some doubted. If there ever was a real appearance of the living Jesus to men so intimately acquainted with him as his own chosen eleven disciples, it does seem strange that either his identity or the reality of his appearance should have ever become a question of doubt with any of them.

Mark differs slightly from Matthew in his account of the resurrection. Both the women mentioned by Matthew come to the sepulcher early in the morning. They find the stone rolled away. They boldly enter the sepulcher, and find, not an angel, but a young man, sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, and they are frightened. This "young man" conveys information to the women similar to that Matthew represents

the angel uttering. Mark enlarges further than Matthew upon the appearance of Jesus to his disciples, and represents Jesus as uttering that illiberal sentiment which has been the baneful source of the most infamous system of persecution that ever disgraced any religion: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." The promulgation of this illiberal doctrine by fire and sword, by the dungeon, the torture and the rack, has held the world in intellectual slavery for seventeen hundred years. But it has happily now lost all pernicious vitality. The place it still holds in Christian theology serves only to show the wonderful emancipation from spiritual slavery that has been made within a single century.

Luke, writing later on the same subject, having never seen Jesus, basing his statements upon the traditions he had received, which in the progress of time were constantly receiving accretions marvelous and mythical in their character, differs very materially from Matthew and Mark, and adds to the scantiness of their meager narratives. In addition to the two original Marys, he introduces other women, whose number he does not designate, assembling at the sepulcher. They enter in and find it empty. *Two* men in shining apparel address them in language similar to that recorded by Matthew and Mark, and quote a prediction of Jesus in support of their statement of the resurrection. Peter, now appearing for the first time in the drama of the resurrection, enters the sepulcher, finds the grave clothes, but nothing more. Jesus afterward appears to many of his disciples and establishes the fact that he is a living human being, and not a mere apparition, by eating fish and a honey-

comb. His conclusion of the story of the resurrection informs us that while Jesus blessed his disciples, he was parted from them and carried up to heaven.

John's account of the resurrection differs materially from that given by Mark. (Mark xvi, 1–5.) Mark says: "And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher, at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great; and entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted." The young man tells the women to go and tell Peter and the rest of the resurrection. John (xx) says: "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together; and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher; and he, stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that

was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulcher, *and he saw and believed; for as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.* Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulcher, weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulcher, and seeth *two angels* in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the foot, where the body of Jesus had lain; and they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." The remainder of John's narrative introduces three distinct apparitions of Jesus to his disciples, including the episode of Thomas pressing his fingers into the marks of the nails, the eating of fish by Jesus, and the miraculous draught of fishes. John further adds that none of the disciples durst ask Jesus who he was, knowing that it was the Lord, and makes no mention of his ascent to heaven.

The variance existing between John's account of the resurrection and that of Mark—and in fact of the two other writers—will be apparent to the most careless reader of the Gospels.

The other accounts substantially agree in describing the apparition of the angel or young man, whichever it was, to the women, his announcing to them the resurrection of Jesus, and his desiring them to tell the news to the disciples, Peter and John visiting again the sepulcher and seeing two angels. Mark says that the women, on their way to carry the intelligence, met Jesus, who addressed them, saying, "All hail!" and that they came *and held him by the feet and worshiped him.* John makes Jesus disclose himself to Mary alone, after she had mistaken him for the gardener—which was a very extraordinary mistake on her part—and then immediately warned her *not to touch him*, for he was not yet ascended to his Father. Yet Jesus, who would not allow himself to be desecrated by the contact of this poor woman, invites and permits doubting Thomas to thrust his hands into his wounds! We care not to magnify these discrepancies and contradictions; but would not such a fatal variance as this, not to mention many others of like character, send the story of the alleged resurrection of any one else out of a court of inquiry where any attention was paid to the law of evidence? Such confusion and such contradictions become all the more inexplicable when we are asked to believe that these several accounts were dictated and inspired by the Divine Spirit of unerring truth. From many considerations it seems apparent that John, in his anxiety to put on record "proofs" of the resurrection, has damaged the case he thought to

establish, or some interpolator may have done so for him after his Gospel was written. We are aware that it has often been urged, and with apparent reasonableness, that the seeming contradictions of the Gospels afford the best proof of their genuineness, and demonstrate the absence of collusion. We would readily admit the fact and all that might be urged as consequent upon it, though we might easily show that in several instances, familiar to all close readers of the Gospels, the accounts of one writer are but actual transcripts, almost the literal and exact language of the others, especially in the first three Gospels; yet they who contend for the harmony of the Gospels should admit that the accounts were written long after the alleged transactions, and were exposed, and not only exposed, but were subjected, to numerous additions, mutilations, corrections and interpolations. On no hypothesis of Divine inspiration are these variances susceptible of explanation or reconciliation. If the doctrine of inspiration be abandoned, then the Gospel narratives will be received subject to the same defenses and criticisms as any other writings of the same antiquity, scope and character. Denuded of the cloak of inspiration, the narrations of the miraculous appearances of the New Testament will stand side by side with the accounts of apparitions and miraculous appearances that occupy the early chapters of Roman and Grecian histories

CHAPTER VIII.

Many theories have been advanced and many speculations indulged in to account for the "resurrection" of Jesus from death. We admit that we have no theory upon which it may be satisfactorily accounted for. Nor do we believe that it devolves upon those who fail to reconcile such an event with the ordinary physical laws and the course of human experience to attempt to account for the credence given to the story of the resurrection of Jesus. Yet if we enter the field of speculation, it may be possible that Jesus did really appear to his disciples after he was crucified and laid away in the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea.

From even the Gospel accounts—and we have no contemporaneous history to rely upon—it may be, it is possible, that Jesus never actually died upon the cross. It will be remembered—accepting the scriptural accounts—that the Jews besought Pilate, the Roman governor, that the bodies of the crucified be not suffered to remain on the crosses, exposed to public gaze, on Friday, it being the "preparation day" for the Sabbath, and that the legs of the crucified might be broken. Pilate grant-

ed this request. We are informed that "the soldiers brake the legs of the first and the other that was crucified with him" (Jesus); "but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already they brake not his legs; but one of the soldiers with his spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." From this it may be inferred that when the Jews, armed with the authority of Pilate, came to the fatal crosses, the two malefactors crucified with Jesus were still living, and that to insure their death their legs were broken, and that Jesus escaped this torture by presenting the appearance of being dead already. It may have been—for we are still dealing with the possibilities—that Jesus had fainted on his cross from suffering, exposure to the heat and loss of blood; that he was in a lipothymous condition in which the vital powers were dormant, but not destroyed; that he subsequently recovered his vitality and consciousness in the silent hours of midnight, as he lay bound in linen cloths, with spiced preparations of myrrh and aloes, "in the windowless palace of rest" hewn from the solid rock. He then emerged—which he easily could have done, if our hypothesis is tenable at all—from his temporary grave, either alone or aided by the friendly women who followed him to the tomb when all had deserted the fallen teacher of Nazareth. He disclosed himself next, for a brief time, to his disciples, though he shrank from close contact with them; yet we are informed that he very logically demonstrated his corporeal reality by the remark, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." Having once undergone the semblance of a disgraceful mode of death, having been crucified in company with the lowest criminals,

his mission was accomplished, and his further appearance in public would have only brought upon him derision and contempt. Disgusted with the treachery of his friends, a disgust that every public man, sooner or later, experiences, sick at heart of the bitter lesson experience had taught of the fate that awaits all reformers who rush against the adamantine walls by which ignorance, bigotry, priestcraft and superstition are protected, he bade a sorrowful adieu to his followers, and found in the interior of Arabia, Egypt or Mesopotamia a life of placid obscurity and a nameless grave.

Or it may be, as the gospel narrative mentions the report current among the Jews, that his disciples carried away his body by night; this being done—if done it was—with the double object of having the remains of their beloved leader in their own possession, and, by secretly disposing of it, to render impossible the successful denial, by actual exhibition of his remains, of the statement that he rose from the dead.

Be this, however, as it may—and it is all conjecture of the most gossamer sort—the grand fact remains, and will remain, that, though Jesus of Nazareth, the son of the carpenter, the dreamer, enthusiast, philanthropist and thaumaturgist, actually died on the cross and surrendered to dissolution the best and purest heart that ever beat in the tabernacle of clay, yet has the Christ conquered death and hell, and inherited the largest and grandest immortality that ever glorified man. What matters it to us what sandhill of Judea or Arabia covered his bones, or on what wind was wafted the odor of the spices which loving solicitude sprinkled over his poor clay, since the influence of his inner and indestructible

life has permeated humanity and given color to the thought and civilization of the human race, not only for eighteen hundred years, but for all the time man shall occupy a place on the surface of this planet? This is the true and stupendous miracle, far surpassing in its immeasurable magnificence all question and conjecture about the crucifixion or reanimation of the body of Jesus, or his apparition, real or fancied, to a few simple-hearted, ignorant and credulous Jewish peasants, women and fishermen.

The favor with which, in many instances, the teaching of Jesus was received, and his increasing popularity, led him into the abandonment, for a short time, of his true mission of a teacher, and to the adoption of the *role* of a political revolutionist. His public entry into Jerusalem, that partook of the character of a political ovation, afforded his enemies a long-coveted opportunity of charging him with a political offense of which the Roman governor would be obliged to take official cognizance. Jesus, doubtless too late, saw the fatal mistake that the ignorant and intemperate zeal of his disciples led him into. He then intuitively perceived that a painful and ignominious form of death would bring his life and work to a premature termination. He did not meet the inevitable with that superb disdain, indifference or even grim triumph with which strong natures have been animated in the face of death inflicted in even its most terrible and appalling aspect. His nature, gentle, nervous and sensitive to physical and mental pain, seems to have shrunk from a mode of death painful in reality and in contemplation. We catch a glimpse of his inner man in the description of the scene in Gethsemane given us by

Mark (xiv, 32): "And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray; and he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him; and he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee: take away this cup from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt." This passage affords an insight of the feelings and conditions of the man Jesus in that hour of supreme trial that develops and exposes the true nature of the individual. This phase of the character of Jesus is irreconcilable with the views entertained of his godship; it even demonstrates that he lacked that dauntless resolution and self-sustaining courage that animated others under similar circumstances. Or is it possible that he then foresaw the grand spiritual conquest that would result from his death, and, dazzled by the magnificence of his future triumph, was indifferent to everything else? Luke (xxi) ascribes to Jesus the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the bondage of the Jews, the perturbation of the heavenly bodies, signs in the sun and moon and stars, and that after these things had happened, then they should see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory, and makes him to add, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away until all these things are fulfilled." A dying man may with perfect safety make as many predictions as he pleases. If they are verified he is esteemed a prophet;

if they fail of accomplishment little importance is attached to the circumstance. Jesus, or any one else, might predict wars, famines and earthquakes. They are, and have been in all ages, ordinary occurrences; but when he ventured to predict violent convulsions in the great heavenly bodies and the coming of the Son of Man or any one else in the clouds with power and great glory, and gave the assurance that the generation of men he addressed would not pass away until all that he predicted was accomplished, he staked his reputation as a prophet upon a prediction that failed of accomplishment. That generation passed away and eighteen hundred years have elapsed since this prophecy was uttered, if uttered by Jesus it ever was, and the fulfillment of the prediction seems as far off now as then. The defenders of the assumptions of inspiration in dealing with this passage of Scripture are driven to explain that "this generation" did not mean the men Jesus is supposed to have addressed, but a future generation who might people the earth when this prophecy should be fulfilled! It is difficult, in view of this explanation, to determine whether the ingenuity of the apologists of inspiration is more astounding than the flexibility of a language by which "this generation" meant future ages.

That the impression of the almost immediate advent of Jesus (after his death) to the earth, coming in the clouds, was entertained, is evident from a well-known passage in the writings of Paul. He, too, fell into this mistake, which he afterward attempted to correct. Writing to the Thessalonians (First Epistle, iv, 15), he says: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord [that is, by inspiration], that *we* which are alive

and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: *then we which are alive and remain* shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Paul, perceiving that he had ventured too far, and that his followers were "shaken in mind" by the apprehension or expectation of the second coming of Jesus, writes to them that this cannot happen "until the man of sin, the son of perdition," be revealed, which gave humanity a new lease of life and afforded inexhaustible material for speculation to Christian theologians in subsequent ages. For nearly two thousand years the theological telescope has been sweeping the religious firmament for some appearance of the terrible prognostics that are to herald the approach in the clouds of the Son of Man. But as yet we have been given nothing but false alarms. Modern interpreters of the prophecies have been led to believe that the man of sin has already come, though they are not quite agreed as to his identity. Many have recognized his diabolic power in Mahomet, some in the Pope of Rome, others in Napoleon I, a few in Napoleon III and the late Czar Nicholas of Russia. The Church of Rome, if it were weak enough to indulge in speculations on the subject, would probably divide the honors between Luther and Bismarck.

The absence of all reference in the works of Josephus to the life and extraordinary career of Jesus has been and still is a subject of much comment. Josephus lived

at the time when, it is alleged, Christianity originated. He is generally admitted to have been a painstaking historian, and it is almost inexplicable that he could have passed over, as unworthy of attention, the public ministry of Jesus, his many miracles—more especially the raising of the dead to life—if these reputed exercises of superhuman and supernatural power were well-authenticated historical facts or had attracted national attention. In the writings of Josephus there are found two very brief allusions to Jesus, one of them merely alluding to him as "a man—if it be lawful to call him a man—who did many wonderful things"; but it is very generally conceded by scholars and critics, both within and outside the Church, that these passages are piously manufactured interpolations, and that they found no place in the original composition of Josephus. If the life and miracles of Jesus were such as the Gospel writers represent, it is highly improbable that Josephus or any other contemporary Jewish writer would have omitted all reference to events so strange and astounding. At the time commonly assigned to the life of Jesus, the Jews were not, as a people, sunk in ignorance or barbarism. The Romans, the most civilized people in the world, occupied and held Judea. Roman armies and Roman officers were quartered through the country. The Roman law was in force. The report of the miracles of Jesus must have reached the Roman governor. We are told that a centurion in the Roman army had a miracle performed in his family; and though it was only the healing of his child, which might or might not have been classed as a "miracle," yet it was such, from the gospel narrative, as to have attracted some attention. Even in the days of

Roman prodigies, portents and oracular responses, which at this time even had become exceedingly rare and of very dubious character, well-authenticated cases of the raising of the dead to life were not of every-day occurrence.

Is not the inference inevitable that the mist of obscurity enveloped both the ministration and the miracles of Jesus; and that previous to his death and the promulgation of his religion, there never was given to his name other than a purely local and provincial notoriety?

This marvelous story of Jesus cannot be *true, if the universe is governed by law.* To account satisfactorily at all for its origin we must believe that the three synoptical gospels were "non-apostolic digests of spoken and written apostolic tradition." This is the view generally entertained by unprejudiced biblical scholars who strive to look at history as it is, and not at what the Church has given to the world as such

It was because Jesus bore the title of King of the Jews, and not that of "the Son of God," that Pilate condemned him to death; though Pilate was so utterly assured of the insignificance and unimportance of the assumption of regal distinction by Jesus in a moment of weakness and at the instigation of a fickle rabble, that he would instantly have dismissed the charge of treason brought against Jesus were it not for the pressure brought to bear upon him by the Jewish priests, who pushed so far as to tell Pilate that if he let "this man" go he was not Cæsar's friend. Further, it may be remarked that there exists very great variance between the Gospel accounts of the only interview that ever occurred between

Jesus and Pilate, and irreconcilable with the hypothesis of divine inspiration.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree in representing that when Pilate asked Jesus if he were the king of the Jews, he only answered, "Thou sayest"; and so remarkable was the silence of Jesus on this momentous occasion that two of the writers add, "And he answered him never a word, insomuch that the governor greatly marveled" (Matt. xxvii, 14; Mark xv, 5). John, however, gives the following account (John xviii, 33, *et seq.*): "Then Pilate entered into the judgment-hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the king of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king, then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world: that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all."

Now, if this account of the only interview between Jesus and Pilate be inspired by the God of truth, and if the conversation between Jesus and Pilate be accurately recorded, what, it may be asked, becomes of the

statement made by the other writers, who agree in reporting that "he answered him never a word, insomuch that the governor greatly marveled"? On no theory can such inconsistency be reconciled if the inspiration of the several conflicting accounts be insisted upon. If, however, the claims to divine inspiration be abandoned—as they should and soon will be universally—if these narratives are treated as all other human compositions, subject to inaccuracies and imperfections, then there will be no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that the writer of the gospel bearing John's name has blended traditionary reports with the creations of a fanciful imagination. We should regret much to be forced to the conclusion that the writer quoted from has given the world an accurate account of this interview between Jesus and Pilate, as, no matter what may have been his intention, he has succeeded in representing Jesus, in the almost supreme act of his life, descending to equivocation of a very dubious kind, and trifling with very solemn questions that admitted easily of plain and direct responses and simple explanations. Had Jesus engaged in this fencing with words, as he is here represented, eagerly grasping trivial admissions, asking Pilate, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell thee," as if it were a matter of any consequence where Pilate's information, if any he had, on the subject was derived from; then, with sarcastic scorn, may Pilate well have replied, "Am I a Jew?" But the language of this recital bears within itself the marks of fabrication. Jesus speaks of being "delivered from the Jews," as though he were a foreigner who had fallen into their hands, and

not a Jew himself. No representative man would so speak of his own people and race.

In dwelling for a moment upon the view of the character of Jesus presented by the narratives of the closing scenes of his life, one is at a loss to account for the stubborn silence and indifference he maintained when brought before Pilate and Herod, foreign as it is to all impressions we have received from following him through all the other scenes of his life. The patriots, reformers and philosophers of the world in days gone by, when brought, in consequence of their advocacy of principles they believed to be true, before tribunals in whose hands were the issues of life and death, appear almost without exception to have advanced in courage and dignity of bearing. They seemed rather to be engaged in trying and condemning their judges—and that is what in reality they have done—than receiving condemnation from their inferiors. Socrates condemned his judges, not the judges Socrates. In that supreme moment, their proud spirits scorning torture, rising far above the ignoble fear of death and all the terrors that confound weak natures, they have magnetized not only their senseless judges, but all future generations of liberty-loving men, by the exhibition of titanic and almost superhuman strength of will. They stepped, as it were, outside of themselves, and seemed rather the incarnation of spiritual forces engaged in a war of ideas, than creatures contending with an unimportant question of life and death. History rejoices that Socrates died as he died, for otherwise we should have lost the "Apology." But neither in the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth before his judges nor in

the painful closing scenes of his life was there any grand, heroic, or even manly assertion of either the purity of his life, the noble aims he had in view, or the sacredness of his mission. The description of Isaiah, though not written for him, might be applied to him with singular propriety: "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." The Gospel accounts all agree in conveying the idea that he fully realized the fate that threatened him, so that his condemnation was anticipated by him. In explanation of his silence, it may have been that, conscious of his integrity, he disdained to reply to the monstrous accusations brought against him, though he did enter into a controversy with the chief priests and elders. The brutal treatment he received at the hands of the debased rabble, instigated by a bigoted priesthood, who spat in his face and smote him in derision with the palms of their hands, may have shocked and humiliated him so as to render him incapable of all utterance except the half-stifled cry of a wounded spirit and broken heart. The records of human wrongs contain nothing sadder than the story of the brutal indignities offered to the mild and tender-hearted Nazarene in the halls of Caiaphas. But eternal justice ever vindicates every crime committed and every outrage inflicted upon the conscience of humanity. It is ever over the Bridge of Sighs that each pioneer of progress marches into the citadel of glory, and, high above the low-lying plains, plants on its impregnable heights the banner of his own immortality.

CHAPTER IX.

The rapid spread of Christianity does not argue either the truth of Revelation or the divine character of its nominal founder. It is unnecessary to dwell upon the means by which the "conversion" of the world was accomplished. Three hundred and thirty years elapsed before Christianity received State recognition. Constantine, who was subject to superstitious impressions, pretended to be converted by the appearance of a fiery cross in the heavens; but he did not venture upon any attack upon the ancient religion of Rome until after the defeat of his pagan colleague Licinius. Then he placed the government of the provinces in the hands of Christians, prohibited the temple worship, and made prayer to the dethroned gods punishable by death. There is no mistake greater than the popular one that indulges in the delusion that Christianity owed its propagation to miraculous interposition or argumentative and philosophical appeals to the intelligent. Not unfrequently has the "conversion" of a pagan or barbarian chief to Christianity been immediately followed by the baptism into the faith of Jesus of the entire tribe over which he

exercised undisputed sway. For the most part religions have been propagated by force and not by argument. The rapidity of the spread of Mahometanism is as marvelous as that of Christianity, and its impression has been equally durable upon a great portion of the human race.

The successful establishment of Mormonism on this continent, in this much-boasted age of enlightenment, and among a people having the reputation of being the most practical in the world, introducing, too, Oriental polygamy, foreign to the moral instincts of our people and the laws and institutions of the Republic, shows how rapidly religious fanaticism finds numerous followers even under very adverse circumstances.

At the time of the introduction of Christianity, all circumstances were extremely favorable for the promulgation of new religious ideas, or old ideas clothed in new garments. The popular religious sentiment of Europe was far advanced in the process of disintegration. The belief in the gods of Greece and Rome had lost all vitality. Theology had sunk into mythology. Four hundred years before Christ, Socrates invaded high Olympus and, with nothing more terrible than a legitimate syllogism, routed the heavenly host—gods, goddesses, demigods and heroes. Plato taught the immortality of the soul, and was the fountain from which St. John drew his inspiration. Pythagoras held the doctrine of transmigration, while many learned and distinguished philosophers regarded death as the final extinction of individual existence. The religious systems and establishments were resting upon popular indifference. They had long since been condemned by the educated classes. They

were even ridiculed by prominent writers with impunity. The orators, of course, made occasional allusions to the altars, shrines and temples of the immortal gods; but this was done merely to add grace and dignity to their orations. The worship of the gods, once decent and solemn, had degenerated into the undisguised exhibition of the grossest licentiousness. The religion of Jesus, dispensing with a priesthood, abolishing expensive and burdensome sacrifices, of benefit only to the priests and their dependents, recognizing the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity, promising eternal happiness to the poor and afflicted, spurning riches and earthly honors, commended itself at once to the oppressed and unfortunate, and made converts among the slaves and illiterate by teaching that they were the equals of the learned and powerful when they accepted the religion of Jesus. Among the early Christians the distinctions of race and class were abolished. "There was neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free." They had all things in common. They were true Communists. A bond of fellowship, hitherto novel in the world, united them as one family. It must, too, be admitted that the purity of life that distinguished the primitive Christians, strangely in contrast with that of their successors, won over to the new belief many disgusted with sacerdotal arrogance, impositions and pretensions, as well as the indecencies of the established worship of the gods. When Christianity, after three or four centuries of existence, succeeded in capturing the support of the Roman rulers, who merely regarded religion as a matter of state policy, it abandoned the simplicity of its primitive worship. It instituted an organized priesthood,

hierarchy, and imposing ritual. It entered the temples deserted by the dethroned gods of Olympus. From the altars of Jupiter incense ascended to Jehovah and Jesus. Women no longer prayed to Juno. The "Virgin Mother" reigned supreme. Pandering to the popular craving for magnificence of worship, it appropriated, with scarcely any modification, the ancient rites and ceremonies of Paganism. To so great an extent did the Roman Church celebrate with splendor the rites of the ancient religions she incorporated with Christianity, that, as has been truthfully remarked, it would have been difficult to tell whether Paganism had been Christianized or Christianity Paganized.

"The pale Galilean has conquered," but it has only been by passing under the yoke of the conquered, and assuming the banners, the emblems and pass-words of the enemy. It is a conquest in which genuine Christianity has disappeared or skulks behind altars, pillars, paintings and music. Christianity, as taught and understood by Jesus and his followers, has ceased to exist for sixteen hundred years. It is doubtful if it ever survived to the close of the second century. Even the infant Church was driven to abandon the communistic idea that distinguished the first few years of its existence. Tacitus informs us that Pompey, in his Syrian wars, broke into the temple at Jerusalem and explored the Holy of Holies, but found no trace of the indwelling divinity. In modern Christianity hardly a trace of the religion of Jesus is discernible. Jesus and his true life might be taken from Christianity without impairing the integrity of the system as it exists. It is doubtful if even his abduction would excite notice, or, if noticed, cause

regret, comment or surprise. It is now a vast soulless ecclesiastical corporation that has woven its web about kings, emperors, constitutional governments and republics. With its maintenance mighty interests are identified. It has permeated the social and political existence of every civilized government on the face of the earth. Its thorough knowledge of the amiable and weak side of human nature has enabled it to ally to its zealous support the almost entire female influence of the civilized world, and the consequent capture of every rising generation. It must be admitted, too, that the dissenting churches have modified both the rigid doctrines of the last century and the manner of their presentation, so as not to offend the intelligence of the age. God is now rarely represented looking down from the battlements of heaven and enjoying a holy satisfaction from the spectacle of countless myriads of his creatures suffering ineffable torments. Heaven is no longer filled with stupid saints whose sole occupation consists in standing around a great white throne, with harps in their hands, singing, "Glory to the Lamb." "Hell" is rarely mentioned among cultivated people. The Devil, with hoofs and horns and leering aspect, that terrified the grown children of the last century, has disappeared, like the mythical ghosts, at the approach of the first gray streaks of morning's dawn. It is now beginning to be understood that moral evil and wrong are not spirits of pandemonium, but the results of imperfect, stunted and erroneous education.

A great truth is embodied in the story of Luther flinging an inkstand at the Devil's head. Witchcraft has fallen dead at the door of the public school-house. The

whistle of the steam-engine has driven off the ghosts and disembodied spirits that haunted the still hour of midnight. Individual independence of character, in part the cause and partly the result of free political institutions, has checked the domineering spirit of priestcraft. The doctrine of the divine right of kings, based upon the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures, once potent in riveting the chains by which the most infamous despots enslaved millions, has scarcely an advocate, even among nations still adhering to the monarchical form of government.

In America the shackles have fallen from the souls and bodies of five millions of people, whose only offense was the color of their skin. This great work was accomplished, not by the supporters of biblical inspiration, but by the awakened conscience of the American people. In this connection it should not be forgotten that from the Bible itself have been drawn the strongest arguments in support of African slavery, which so long tarnished the fair name of the Republic of the United States, and which for nearly a century corrupted the lifeblood of the freest nation on earth.

It has been only since the Reformation, which was a revolt of free thought against the overwhelming tyranny of theology and ecclesiasticism, that the Indo-European races have advanced by such marvelous strides in the field of scientific investigation, the result of which has been the discovery of natural laws and principles whose application to the necessities of the age has been of the highest importance to mankind. The Reformation, though a very partial and incomplete emancipation, bore within it the germ of the mighty progressive movement

that has carried forward the European intellect during the last three hundred years. Probably previous to the movement of the Reformation, Europe produced as great and original thinkers as at any successive period, though we do not assert that this is so; but it must be admitted that the average of intelligence has advanced to a higher standard than ever before attained since man's appearance upon the earth. Three hundred years ago a man who could write his name and read with facility his mother speech in a printed book was considered well educated. At present the man who lives by his daily toil is better acquainted with the social and political movements of the times than the mailed baron of the Middle Ages was with the history and policy of the age in which he lived. The invention of printing, the application of steam to locomotion, and the discovery of the electric telegraph have revolutionized the world. Yet is mankind but in the infancy of intellectual growth. The achievements of the past, wonderful and magnificent as they confessedly are, are as toys and playthings compared with the evolutions and revolutions of future generations. Fifty years ago had a man been found bold enough to predict that within the lapse of a few years a wire would be laid between Europe and America by which a message could be transmitted across the ocean in far less time than occupied in delivering it, he would have been universally regarded as a lunatic. Who doubts that, five hundred years hence, should any of our inventions remain, they will be regarded with an interest similar to that we bestow upon the rude stone implements and antiquarian remains of the aborigines of this continent?

A true poet of our own days, who ever appreciates with almost prophetic foresight the great movements of humanity, has well sung:

"Well—were it not a pleasant thing
To fall asleep with all one's friends;
To pass with all our social ties
To silence from the paths of men;
And every hundred years to rise
And learn the world, and sleep again;
To sleep through terms of mighty wars,
And wake on science grown to more,
On secrets of the brain, the stars,
As wild as aught of fairy lore;
And all that else the years will show,
The poet-forms of stronger hours,
The vast republics that may grow,
The federations and the powers;
Titanic forces taking birth
In divers seasons, divers climes;
For we are ancients of the earth,
And in the morning of the times."

CHAPTER X.

There are branches of investigation in which knowledge is obtained. There are exact sciences. There is truth in arithmetic, in geometry, in geology, in botany, in astronomy, and in all the physical sciences. No matter what widely divergent and contradictory views men may entertain on the subject of religion, they will unite in recognizing a mathematical truth. But when the claims of several writings supposed to contain the expression of the Divine will are made the subject of inquiry, immediately the bitterest controversy and confusion inextricable arise. The believer in the inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures and the unbeliever have no common ground on which to stand. The believer accepts them as infallibly true, without attempting to adduce proof to convince himself or others of the correctness of his belief. He needs no proof. It is all with him a matter of faith, and he believes that his salvation would be imperiled did he attempt to doubt for an instant their divine authenticity. The infidel will assert that as an embodiment of divine truth his reason cannot accept the Bible. To him it is no more sacred than the

poems of Homer or Hesiod, the Vedas or the Koran. As a picture of Oriental life and manners it is interesting; as marking the moral and spiritual development of a portion of mankind it is probably of more value than any other work that has survived the accidents of time. He will assert that it was composed at different epochs of the world's history by men, for the most part of ordinary ability. He will assert that parts of both the Old and New Testaments are such as ought never to have been translated and placed indiscriminately in the hands of the youth of both sexes. He would also assert that the Scriptures are full of discrepancies, contradictions and absurdities that ought to find no place in a book claiming to contain a revelation of Divine will, and contain false recitals of miracles and physical impossibilities in the economy of nature. He would contend that as Revelation it is a failure, as it contains nothing not discoverable by the exercise of ordinary intelligent observation when it pretends to deal with human events; that it fails to define what is soul and what is spirit, the origin of the universe, if it had an origin, and the existence of God; that its writers were grossly ignorant of astronomy and were very imperfectly acquainted with the causes or operations of physical laws; that they, for the most part, in childlike simplicity, imagined that the heaven was a solid sphere in which the stars were set; that the deluge was caused by the opening of the windows of heaven and letting down the waters that were above the firmament; that the rainbow was placed by Jehovah in the sky as a sign that he would never again drown the world, when in truth its appearance is caused by an ordinary operation of nature that every schoolboy

is acquainted with; that the God of the Universe ate cakes with Abraham and wrestled with Jacob; that Moses with a magic rod divided the waters of the Red Sea; that a pillar of fire and a cloud for forty years guided a single tribe through a wilderness; that God dwelt in a box called an ark, and was on one occasion captured in battle; that Jehovah as a deity is not entitled to ordinary respect, much less adoration and worship; that he is exhibited constantly as repenting and changing his intentions; that in moments of irritation he has killed by sword, pestilence, fire from heaven, famine and earthquakes, not only thousands of his creatures whom he regards as enemies, but even his own chosen people; that he has frequently, in wanton exhibition of his power, worked the most senseless miracles, such as making an ass speak with human speech, and creating a whale or large fish in which to imprison for three days a disobedient prophet; that one of his prophets ascended alive to heaven in a chariot of fire; that he himself assumed the form of a burning bush; that he sent lying prophets to lure his enemies to destruction, which in a human ruler would be characterized as basest treachery; that he exhibited his hind parts to Moses; that he has blessed murderers and assassins; that he sanctioned and directed the extermination of helpless women, prattling infants and dumb cattle; that he permitted his old enemy Satan, on an express understanding between them, and to settle a dispute that originated in heaven, to torment his servant Job so that he cursed the day he was born; and, finally, that, after for ages, running into thousands of years, endeavoring to save his people from eternal hell and its torments by means of

sacrificial offerings and religious observances, he abandoned the scheme as impracticable, and, as a last resource, sent, some nineteen hundred years ago, his son, born of a woman, into the world, whom he caused to be crucified; that his blood spilled is the last grand sacrifice that Jehovah accepts in complete satisfaction for all past and future offenses of mankind.

That there existed no necessity for a "divine" communication such as the Jewish Scriptures give us hardly needs discussion. If the mere surface-reading of the scattered fragments of Jewish legends, history, poetry and mythology that are called the Scriptures does not inevitably lead to the dissipation of all inspirational pretenses, no argument, however reasonable, and no appeals, however earnest, to the understanding and intelligence, will avail to efface the almost indelible impressions of superstitious reverence for the Bible that formed the basis of the education of the world up to a recent period.

We concede freely and thankfully that the greater portion of the New-Testament writings, aside from the barbarous doctrine of the atonement and the story of the miracles of Jesus, contain many noble enunciations of divine truth—and all truth is divine—of morality, self-denial, charity, and all the virtues. But it by no means follows, because of these excellences, that it owes its origin to any higher inspiration than ought to be ascribed to the productions of many others—poets, historians, philosophers and thinkers—who have, in every age, since civilization attained any advanced degree of development, dignified humanity by their labors and consecration to its service. Whatever of truth is contained in the Scriptures will survive to sweeten and dignify life; but all

that is untrue, of local and sectarian application, must and ought to perish. The Old-Testament writings are chiefly valuable as indicating the progress man has made in religious ideas. As man advanced in knowledge, the conceptions of the deity or the gods he worshiped underwent a change. Even from the Bible we can see the bed-rock foundation of the modern temple. The hosts of heaven, the sun, moon and stars, were among the first objects of worship. Then came serpent-worship, which may be recognized even in the Mosaic dispensation. The sacrifice of animals succeeded human sacrifices. This was a step in advance. Now the intelligence of the world revolts against the absurdity of animal sacrifice, and we have the milder and bloodless substitute, the sacrifice of praise and prayer. In the religion of the future there will be neither altars, priests nor sacrifices. No prayer will be idly offered up to the *Inevitable* and *Necessary*. It will be recognized that inexorable Law permeates all nature, animate and inanimate, sentient and senseless; that its existence is proclaimed with equal magnificence and significance in the motions of the unnumbered systems of worlds that rotate in limitless space as in the composition of the minutest atom that floats on a sunbeam. On every side is impenetrable mystery, for mystery is but another name for ignorance. Life is a mystery. Death is a mystery. The existence of anything is a mystery, and annihilation is impossible. Man is mortal. Humanity is immortal. The individual is nothing: the race is omnipotent. The soldier drops out of the ranks, but the army moves on forever. Its destiny is progress. Revolutions never go backward. Larger light, fuller growth, freer movement, wider views

and nobler aims distinguish each increasing age. The world is greater, freer, happier, purer and stronger now than a hundred years ago. The golden age never did exist, and least of all in the days of darkest ignorance, abjectest slavery, cruelest oppression and sternest religious domination. The fingers of priestcraft and kingcraft no longer clutch the throat of civilization. Even the churches have abandoned preaching the doctrine of eternal hell. The light of a better civilization is streaming down upon us and our children. Scientific inquiry is expanding the bounds of knowledge and dissipating the clouds of myths and superstition that enveloped the human understanding. Popular education has attained a high standard. The inventive faculty which so largely distinguishes the present age is rapidly reducing the natural forces into the service of man and rendering manual occupations less severe and laborious. The treasures of art and literature are no longer the exclusive possessions of the rich and powerful, but are spread broadcast before the people. It is beginning to be understood, in political science, that governments are intended for the benefit of the governed, and that in the people is vested and inheres all sovereign power. And though the time has not yet come when

> "The war-drum beats no longer, and the battle-flags are furled,
> In the parliament of man, the federation of the world,"

yet assuredly it is fast approaching. The intelligence of mankind, that has rendered religious persecution impossible, that has forever swept out of existence the racks, the thumbscrews, the iron boots, the gibbet, the fagot, and all other infernal instruments of torture by which bigotry

sought to arrest intellectual growth, will yet obliterate war, the crowning curse and crime of humanity.

When men shall become thoroughly convinced that no amount of faith, no matter how fervent, can modify in the slightest the immutable laws of nature; when they shall cease chasing phantoms through quagmires and treacherous morasses of speculation; when all the intellectual forces shall be directed to the improvement of our earthly condition; when all the energy, time, wealth, genius and power now employed in sustaining churches founded upon myths and sustained by ignorance or hypocrisy shall be diverted to noble fields of labor; when the magnificent forces now wasted and perverted, in attempting to fasten Oriental mythologies and Asiatic mysticism upon the civilization of the present, shall enter the domain of scientific investigation—then may we look for the approach of man's conquest, not only over nature, but over the vicious principles, emanating from a false education, that have rendered, in the past, this happy earth a hell filled with violence, oppression, crime and cruelty.

CHAPTER XI.

For nearly two thousand years Christianity has had under its direction the shaping of the civilization of the European races. Yet for sixteen centuries in which the influence of the Church was supreme and undisputed, Europe presented almost a changeless aspect of wars, bloodshed, cruelty, ignorance, despotism, and the suppression of national and individual liberty. For this condition of complete barbarism the Church must be held accountable. It has been only since the Church began to lose its influence, both over governments and individuals, that education has become at all popular. All through the ages properly called dark, the priesthood was partially educated, yet we find no attempt made to convey to the people even the rudest elements of instruction. The celebration of the mass and the performance of vulgar "miracle-plays," that would now be considered indecent and blasphemous, were the only intellectual exercises, if such they might be called, offered to the people. Yet while these "holy plays," which served to debase the popular taste, were encouraged, the legitimate drama was placed under the ban of the Church.

The populace delighted in such miserable productions as the "Feast of Fools," and the "Feast of Asses," performed in the churches, which consisted of indecent dances, caricatures of the priesthood and parodies of the mass. The writer has himself, as late as 1859, witnessed in Brittany, France, the performance of one of these rude plays, in which the crucifixion was represented. It is hardly necessary to remark that the only feeling it excited was one of inexpressible disgust; yet the rustics seemed to enjoy it. It must, however, in justice be stated that the performance was not in a church, nor under the sanction of the clergy. Yet while the noble dramas of Euripides, Sophocles and Æschylus were interdicted, these wretched burlesques were not only tolerated, but encouraged. Ignorance was canonized, but the tragic muse was anathematized. Noble actors who added to the sum of human happiness, who refined and civilized the manners of the age by delineation of the heroic characters of history or the creations of the imagination, were regarded as moral lepers, and excommunicated. The actress Le Couvreur, brilliant and beautiful, was denied interment in consecrated ground, and was buried in a field for cattle by the banks of the Seine. Both Philip II and Philip IV banished actors from Spain. Father Posadas caused the destruction of the theater of Cordova, while the Council of Illiberis, one of the oldest on record, prohibited any Christian woman from marrying an actor. Indeed, even at present, the senseless prejudice against actors and theaters still exists, and is fostered by the churches

Nothing is truer than that the Church, as long as it had the power, has been the relentless opponent of intel-

lectual development and the bitter exterminator of every advocate of free thought and progress. The French Revolution, full of grandeur and full of shame, was as much an upheaval of the people against the despotism of the altar as the throne. To the unprejudiced reader of history it is not a subject of wonderment that the people of France then, intoxicated with the strong draughts of the new wine of liberty they drank, and delirious from the effects of a long night of unparalleled suffering and degradation, should not only have exterminated royalty, but proceeded further to abolish the very name of God, under whose assumed sanction so many unutterable cruelties and indignities had been inflicted upon them for centuries. Crowning a beautiful ballet-girl, though of lax morals, as goddess of Reason, was a significant rebuke to a debauched priesthood, and a sublime defiance to a despotism that had enslaved and corrupted the brilliant genius of France. It was the legitimate retort of long-pent forces, though we need hardly say that as an example it is unworthy of imitation. If cruelty unspeakable has disgraced one of the freest movements the world ever has known, let it not be forgotten that the head of the Church of Christ blessed the butchers who made the sewers of Paris run red with the blood of Protestant Frenchmen, Frenchwomen and children on St. Bartholomew's day. Let it be remembered that Llorente himself, a secretary in the Inquisition, tells us (Hist. de l'Inquisition, Tome IV, pp. 271, 272) that, by the Spanish Inquisition alone, excluding its infernal work in Mexico, Carthagenia, the Indies, Lima, Sicily, Sardinia and Malta, thirty-one thousand persons of all ages, ranks, and both sexes perished in the flames, and two hundred and ninety

thousand were condemned to minor punishment. Let it be remembered that under Charles V not less than fifty thousand suffered death for religious opinions, only a little over three hundred years ago. Let it be remembered that by sentence of the Holy Office, Feb. 16, 1568, all the inhabitants of the Netherlands were condemned to death as heretics. Let it be remembered also, in connection with all these atrocities, that the wretched victims of ignorance and superstition were not destroyed by a painless process, but were, in many instances, roasted alive, hung in chains over slow fires, had their eyes put out with hot irons, their bones pulled out of their sockets, and the flesh torn from their limbs. Let it, too, be remembered that these massacres that turned all Europe into an Aceldama, and every city into a Golgotha, were not confined to the Catholic Church, that instituted the religious persecution. The persecuting spirit manifested itself equally in the Protestant Church, but the clerical influence in Protestant countries was fortunately weak, sickly and short-lived. Let this be remembered, and some excuse may be found for the excesses of the French Revolution. History repeats itself. It sometimes avenges itself.

The romance of inspiration tells us that the birth of Jesus of Nazareth was heralded by an angelic apparition to shepherds watching their flocks by night on the lonely hills of Palestine, and that the heavenly messengers sang the blessed anthem, "Peace on earth to men of good will!" Yet to-day, after nineteen centuries of Christianity and Christology, all Europe is a camping-ground, occupied by standing armies numbering four millions, drilled and equipped for human slaughter; and, doubt

less, when the trumpet's blast sounds the call to battle, rapine and desolation, and lets loose the avalanche of blood, the silken banners of the mighty hosts will be blessed by white-robed priests, while with solemn services and imposing rites the favor of the God of Battles will be invoked as of old.

What a commentary is this upon the "divine" origin and mission of religion!

How much is purely mythical and how much was real and actual in the life of Jesus must remain forever undetermined. Jesus has passed beyond the domain of satisfactory investigation. The Gospel narratives are as unreliable as they are meager. Neither the authorship of them nor the dates of their composition is established beyond controversy. All biblical scholars know that many of the passages expressive of the divine and supernatural origin of Jesus, as well as the doctrine of the trinity, are interpolations, though had they been genuine they would prove nothing. What additions, alterations, omissions and mutilations they were undoubtedly subjected to in the first four centuries cannot now be accurately determined. Practically, the doctrine of biblical inspiration has been abandoned except in monkish cloisters, where the honest light of inquiry never beamed. The Church of Rome still adheres to it, as well as to the extravagant legends of the early centuries; but when was she ever known to abandon any doctrine she once taught or recede from a single arrogant pretension? It is only within a few years that she solemnly promulgated the even grossly unscriptural doctrines of the Immaculate Conception of the mother of Jesus, and the Infallibility of the Pope of Rome, amid the derisive con-

tempt of all dissenting churches and against the earnest though ineffectual protest of the intelligent element of her own episcopate. But the spirit of scientific or historical investigation never enters her portals. She has stifled all free inquiry. She tolerates no dissent. She kindly relieves her members of all the burden of investigation. Nor will she abandon her claims to the sovereignty of the heart and intellect and the control of the human conscience until the emancipated intelligence of the world sounds the tocsin of her doom.

Conceding merely for the sake of argument that the influence of religious worship, based upon doctrines and presumptions untrue in fact, has been on the whole beneficial to mankind, a question arises, worthy of consideration, whether any form of worship or any religion that does not commend itself to reason and intelligence should be, for the sake of a doubtful good, sanctioned and sustained outwardly by those who repudiate as childish the theory of miraculous interpositions and the divine communication of Revelation, so called? Can any system of morality based upon a fiction be beneficial to mankind? Can we be elevated by continuing to express belief in a religion all of whose assumptions are opposed to reason, intelligence and the results of scientific investigation? If Jesus of Nazareth was not God or the son of God, born of a virgin in Judea about two thousand years ago; if Jesus never worked the miracles attributed to him, never fed five thousand hungry people with five loaves and two small fishes, and after they had eaten took up twelve basketsful of the broken food; if he was never taken bodily up to the pinnacle of the temple by

the Devil; if he never raised a man to life really dead; if he never raised himself from the dead, and, with the wounds he received still fresh in his body, cut his way through the clear air up to heaven, wherever it may be; if the blood that ran from him at his crucifixion was not, and could not be, an atonement for the moral guilt of the world, past, present and future—if not a single one of these allegations be true, can humanity be improved and elevated by accepting them as absolute verities, as well as the early mythology of the Jewish race? Can they who refuse to accept these legends, if legends they be, consistently support a popular religion based, as they believe, on utterly false assumptions?

To this it may be replied that noble lessons of morality and self-restraint may be found in works of pure fiction. This is undoubtedly true. Yet no violence is done either the conscience or intelligence, because the fiction is universally admitted. But it is different when the fiction assumes the form of a religion. Is he true to his own manhood who, believing the assumed miraculous origin of Christianity purely mythical, lifts no voice, however weak, against what he believes to be an imposition, and, by his silence, leads others to infer that conscious assent may be given to error without serious detriment to the conscience of an individual? Does not even a danger graver than that denounced as "open infidelity" threaten society, when hypocrisy is practiced without compunction, and men suppress free thought and honest conviction through fear of being considered atheists, infidels, free-thinkers and materialists? The atheist or infidel who discharges honestly and intelligently the duty he owes to himself, his family and society to the

best of his ability, uninfluenced by hope of future reward or apprehension of future punishment, exhibits far more true nobleness of character than the pious man who worships God after the fashion, or fears the Devil from prudential motives. To do right because it is right is the highest moral development man can attain. It is this quality that pre-eminently distinguishes manhood from animalhood. This elevation of moral dignity can only be attained by the freest exercise of all the faculties, moral and intellectual. Absolute perfection will, of course, never be attained, yet will man ever restlessly pursue his El Dorado and the fabled fountains of perpetual life. He is ever conscious that grander prospects will gladden his eyes, and that his feet will press loftier heights than his fathers reached. Science, and not the Devil, will take the son of man of the future up to the very pinnacle of the fair temple of knowledge, and reveal to his enraptured gaze all the glories of his own world and the outlying systems of universes, revolving in the fathomless depths of originless and endless infinity.

When the full light, streaming on the magnificent panorama, shall have revealed to him the unimagined grandeur and harmony of nature's laws; when his soul shall have grasped, in all its completeness, the relation of the atom to the universe and the universe to the atom; when, denuded of the garments with which priestcraft and superstition have enveloped it, the dematerialized form of Necessity shall disclose its presence, whether in the dewdrop glistening in the morning grass, or in the revolution of the starry heavens; when he shall grasp the idea that Eternity has no tenses, that matter is un-

created and indestructible, and that law, and not chance or arbitrary interference, disposes the relation of all existences one to the other—then he will trouble himself little as to what form of worship ignorance may have assumed to satisfy its craving for something better than it had known.

When Science shall reveal the nature and composition of the now occult forces whose existence is only discernible by their manifestations; when we shall know something more of attraction, gravitation, heat, motion and magnetism than the mere names we give to these mighty elements; when a knowledge of the principles of life and thought itself shall constitute the basis of the education of the world—then man, divorced alike from faith and superstition, twin daughters of ignorance, shall have no need for any religious system, and worship shall only consist in the exercise of the reasoning powers. Intelligent inquiry and scientific investigation have almost left the churches behind. The religious systems that have existed are but milestones denoting the progress man has made along the weary way he has trodden for countless centuries, stained with tears and blood, in his career from the lowest condition of savage existence to his present intellectual development.

Religions are stationary, but Science is ever advancing, making new conquests. The assumptions of the miraculous origin of Christianity and many of its doctrines are no longer in harmony with the advanced spirit of the age. The Church stands still and views the changed aspect of the age with well-grounded alarm. She no longer anathematizes Science, because Science has escaped from her grasp and refuses to turn aside from her legiti-

mate course either at entreaty or denunciation. The infallible Pope occasionally hurls his ecclesiastical thunderbolts at the head of his rebellious subjects; but his lofty pretensions, at variance with the spirit of the times, excite only profound commiseration. Faith has lost control of the intellect of the world. It is well satisfied if let alone. It asks the world to respect its age and not view too cynically its threadbare garments. Science, caring nothing for the past, except to regret it, is unmoved by the attitude of faith. In no vandalistic or iconoclastic spirit does it seek the destruction of any religious systems. It busies itself with neither their maintenance nor dissolution. Its mission is to widen the field of human inquiry, to define man's place in nature, and purify and sweeten life, as well as dignify humanity by making man acquainted with the laws of his being and existence. If, however, the result of increased intellectual development shall be to dissipate all faith in miraculous interpositions of the past, and render impossible the reception by intelligence of any Revelation based upon hypotheses that involve the most glaring contradictions of the well-established natural laws on a knowledge of which our very existence is dependent, then, and in such an event, may we rest fully assured that such a result, instead of being injurious morally, spiritually or materially, will subserve the interests of humanity in the present and in the future.

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